

## **INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA NETWORKS**

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### **Summary**

International communication networks have controlled which information has been collected and how it has been distributed. Information networks began initially as official systems of the imperial states to maintain their empires. As these networks improved and trade expanded, information was shared based on diplomacy, religion and trade. Financial information gained importance between nations and thus became the basis for news agencies to form. The four major news agencies - Havas, Reuters, Wolff and Associated Press - were established primarily to make a profit. As the cartel managed news flow around the world, non-aligned news agencies developed in opposition. Regional broadcast associations formed to protect regions from cultural imperialism and to provide programming designed for the region. These networks, through memberships, have attempted to restrict competition within their regions; however, the power of the transnational media companies has reduced the flow of international information again to the colonial structures established by the news agency cartel in the nineteenth century. The same industrialized countries, with the addition of Japan and Australia, collect and distribute information. The same problems of disparities between the information rich and the information poor exist in the twentieth century as they did in the nineteenth century. Whereas technology was to lessen the gap between the information rich and information poor, the twenty-first century indicates that the gap is growing wider.

### **1. Introduction**

One way to trace the evolution of international communication is through the history of

media network formation. Media networks have influenced the direction of communication flows beginning with the imperial routes, continuing with the competition of the early news agencies, and then the development of broadcast networks and satellite consortiums. These media networks were intended to limit competition and increase profitability of the network participants. The networks ensured that only a few companies controlled information and information routes by restricting participation in the system. This concentration of control of global information has created problems from the very beginning, when the news agency cartel was formed. Chief among the problems is the obstacle the networks create for countries in the periphery seeking to communicate with core countries on an equal basis. For example, the four major news agencies were located in the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany, the very regions in which world power has historically been concentrated. [See *History and Development of Mass Communications*.] The countries of the northern hemisphere, mainly the industrialized countries (United States, Japan, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy) have controlled the flow of information and owned the major media companies. The major broadcast networks and satellite consortiums have also been located in these countries. Whereas the news agencies divided the world among themselves and developed techniques to keep others from competing, the new broadcast and satellite networks maintain the same dominance through financial power, and program exportation and distribution. Other nations that cannot afford to compete are left out. However, countries out of the ring or the core have sought ways to increase their presence in discussions on communication flows, and to address imbalances by forming alternative services and agencies such as the non-aligned press associations.

## **2. Development of International Communications**

Communication networks can be traced to the European and Asian empires. These networks were established to maintain the imperial systems. One such imperial system of horses and couriers was set up by the Persian emperor Cyrus (sixth century BCE) to deliver official messages throughout his empire. In addition to the system of horses and couriers, carrier pigeons and fire signals were used by early Egyptians. The Han dynasty (206 BCE - 219 ACE) developed an extensive postal system to transmit news around the empire in the form of handwritten newsletters. Within the Roman Empire, communication routes were developed. These often were limited to empire exchanges but there are recordings of communication exchanges connected with diplomacy, religion and trade with nations outside the empires. [See *History of Journalism and News Reporting*.]

Records indicate that there were communications among the following national systems for diplomatic reasons: Egyptian, Hellenic, Greek, Chinese and Byzantine. Later other communications were handled by Christian apostles who traveled throughout Asia Minor, Greece and the Roman Empire. Missionaries went to Egypt and Africa by 200 ACE. These communication routes, beginning first as diplomatic routes, were broadened to include other nations when missionaries traveled. These exchanges of information and culture connected Asia, the Mediterranean, Africa and the Pacific. Spice and silk routes connected Mesopotamia and Iran with India and China. The key trading cities became the chief news centers. The first trade's' news agency was

established in Venice in 1536. By 1600 the demand for information reached such a level that it was justified economically to find printed means for distributing it. The fifteenth century saw the first organized distribution of information to other nations.

International information was distributed by the Fugger letters between 1568 and 1604. These hand-written letters were created by Philip Eduard Fugger. [See *Newspapers, Newsletters and Pamphlets.*] By the mid-sixteenth century, the Venetian *Gazette* could be found in London. Most international messages were about either politics or the military. News sheets located in Amsterdam in the late sixteenth century contained foreign reports on Italy, Germany, America, Africa and Asia. Cross-border communications increased as a cosmopolitan academic community emerged and the scientific community expanded.

Semaphore systems were introduced in France in 1790 by Claude Chappe. They were then used in England and Germany. The semaphore system was an apparatus based on Chappe's tachygraph, later called the telegraph, a mast connected to a two-armed beam. By repositioning the beam and arms, words or phrases were sent long distances. Towers placed six to ten miles apart were used for personnel to display letters in code to be read by telescopes by personnel in the next nearest tower. The message was then passed on to the next tower and the next until a courier relayed the final message to its destination. Semaphore systems were used for government official messages in Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, England, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia and Sweden. [See *Radio.*]

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**Dr. Leara Rhodes** is Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Georgia. Her research focuses on the role media play in society. She has researched the roles media play in forming a more democratic society, in improving management philosophies for media owners, and in changing societal norms. Her book, *Democracy and the Role of the Haitian Media*, published by Mellen Publishers in the U.K., examines how important a role media play during a country's transition from an autocratic to a more democratic form of government. She has published in various journals including *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Development Communication*, *Caribbean Affairs Journal* and *International Third World Studies Journal and Review*. Chapters contributed by Dr. Rhodes have been published in *Slavery in the Francophone World: Literary, Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, *Enterprise of the Indies*, *Mass Media in 2025* and *The American Magazine: Research Perspectives and Prospects*. She teaches courses in *International Communication*, *Media Management*, and *writing and editing*. She received her Ph.D. in Mass Communication from Temple University in Philadelphia.