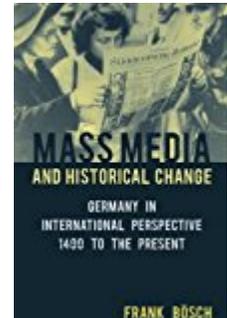




Frank Bösch. *Mass Media and Historical Change: Germany in International Perspective, 1400 to the Present.* New York: Berghahn, 2015. 212 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78238-625-4.



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In the Anglophone world, media and communication history is a flourishing field of academic study. Universities in Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, and Canada boast specialized research and teaching centers attached to either communication or history departments, or both. Noteworthy examples are: in Great Britain, the Centre for the Study of Journalism and History at Sheffield University, the Centre for Media History at the University of Aberystwyth, the Centre for the Study of War, Propaganda and Society at the University of Kent, Canterbury, and the Centre for Media History at the University of Bournemouth; in Ireland, the Centre for the History of the Media at University College Dublin; in Australia, the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University, Sydney; and in Canada, the Media History Research Centre at Concordia University in Montréal.[1]

In Germany, by contrast, media and communication history is barely institutionalized; neither communication nor history departments offer specialized degrees. Very few chairs in communication studies have a full or partial historical

focus, and media and communication history is gradually disappearing from the academic curricula.[2] Moreover, funding for the existing small research centers of media and communication history is continuously being decreased by universities. A case in point is the Deutsche Presseforschung at Bremen University, founded in 1957 and specializing in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century press, in the German-Jewish press, and in transnational media history, which is fighting for its very survival.[3] This does not mean, however, that individual German communication scholars are not interested in historical research. Rudolf Stöber, Jürgen Wilke, Arnulf Kutsch, Michael Meyen, Susanne Kinnebrock, Markus Behmer, and Klaus Arnold, to name just a few, have all made significant contributions to the field.

While historical topics have generally suffered an (institutional) loss of interest in German communication studies, over the past two decades the historical profession has increasingly turned toward the media, taking them not only as a

source to enrich their historical narrative but also as a historical subject in its own right. Media and communication history is not yet formally institutionalized within history departments—there are no dedicated professorships or degrees, nor do specialized professional associations exist. But an increasing number of emerging scholars and established professors, among them Ute Daniel, Axel Schildt, Clemens Zimmermann, and Gerhard Paul, are focusing their research on media and communication.[4] Moreover, some research institutions have set up special research areas in media history. The Department of Contemporary History of the Media and Information Society at the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam is a case in point.[5]

Frank Bösch, professor of twentieth-century German and European history at Potsdam University and director of the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam, has dedicated considerable attention to researching media history.[6] In 2011, he published *Mediengeschichte: Vom asiatischen Buchdruck zum Fernsehen*, a textbook-style introduction to the history of media from ancient times to the present that also offers additional materials, such as primary sources, bibliography, and index, for free download on the publisher's homepage.[7] This book has now been translated into English and published with minor additions and alterations to the original text (especially in the introduction) and a slightly revised bibliography under the title *Mass Media and Historical Change: Germany in International Perspective, 1400 to the Present*.

Addressing students, interested general readers, and specialists alike, the book recounts media innovations and their appropriation from the invention of printing in Asia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to the present era of the Internet, highlighting under-explored areas and pointing out perspectives for future research. Although the book's main focus is on technological inventions, this is not a technology-centered me-

dia history: "This book shows how new media have emerged and have been used since the invention of printing and how they have influenced societal developments. The social and cultural history of the media rather than the history of technology and ideas will be given priority. It is the intention of this book to provide an overview of the evolution of media and their impact on societies" (pp. 1-2). While Bösch addresses media developments in Europe, the United States, and Asia, thus offering an international and transnational media history, the German perspective stands at the center of the book. The author argues that many new media emerged in early modern Germany, such as the printing press around 1450 and the first newspaper in 1605. Until the nineteenth century, Germany was the global leader in the press, measured in terms of the number of newspapers, journals, and pamphlets. Even in the twentieth century, when the United States became the leading country in the development of media, German film studios, printing houses, and broadcasting stations remained internationally important. German media also stood at the center of international conflict during two world wars and the Cold War. While Bösch aims to bring to the attention of English-speaking researchers the rich German scholarship on media history—so far little known outside German-speaking countries—he also seeks to overcome traditional national master narratives and perspectives of single countries. For instance, book printing did not originate in Europe, but in East Asia, yet many traditional media histories begin with Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. Finally, Bösch rightly argues that the writing of media history from a purely national perspective is hardly possible: "Media have always connected across borders, even when they stimulated national movements or prejudices against other countries. Consequently, the research of media should have an international perspective, especially when we look at the circulation of news or media techniques" (pp. 2-3).

Mass Media and Historical Change is organized in five thematic chapters presented chronologically. The introduction offers a useful overview of German and international traditions in press and media historiography, of the different methodological approaches and terminology used in communication studies and historical scholarship, of the available sources (printed and digitized), and of the key scholarly literature. Following more recent strands in media historiography emanating from historical scholarship, Bösch concentrates on the media's social, cultural, and political significance rather than on technology itself: "Media respond to societal needs and thus are part of history as a whole. The million-fold increase in demand that determines their function and modus operandi was not created simply through technical innovations but rather by a social framework and users, who in turn generate needs" (p. 6). In the five chapters that follow, Bösch highlights the development of new media and their societal significance, focusing on "the momentous role played by the respective media during various epochs and their significance for such pivotal events in human history as the Reformation, revolutions, wars and dictatorships" (pp. 11-12).

Chapter 1 narrates the breakthrough of typographic printing in Asia and Europe during the late Middle Ages and the Reformation. Bösch rightly corrects the widespread but erroneous view that Gutenberg invented the printing press with movable letters in mid-fifteenth-century Germany. This view, Bösch argues, results from a distinctly Western perspective. Seen from a global point of view, printing with movable letters was already established during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in China and Korea. It was from Germany, though, that the printing technique spread across Europe and beyond over the following centuries. Unlike many scholars who have conceived the invention of the printing press as a "media revolution" in the sense of a sudden change and a powerful impact of the new media

technology on society, Bösch stresses the slow process of disseminating Gutenberg's invention (pp. 19, 30). Still, the new printing technology had far-reaching societal effects, accelerating alphabetization, expanding the market for printed leaflets and books, and encouraging individualization and logical rationalism.

Chapter 2 chronicles the rise of the periodical press and its usage and effect during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first newspaper appeared in 1605 in Strasbourg. Over the course of less than two centuries, newspapers and journals spread over the whole of Europe and beyond. Their rise was closely connected with the expansion of the postal network, and the shape of the new medium was conditioned by the social, cultural, and political framework prevailing in different countries. Bösch provides a variety of case studies that testify to the differences in media policy and formats. Still, European newspapers were surprisingly similar in content and form with foreign news dominating the reporting, while regional news made up only 10 percent of the coverage. Although the rise of the periodical press was not caused by any new technological inventions, it has nevertheless been termed a "media revolution" because of its significant impact on how people perceived the world and interacted with each other. Newspapers and journals influenced political communication and ruling practices at home as well as interactions with rulers in foreign countries. Moreover, they increased the popular demand for political information, thus leading to a politicizing of society.

In chapter 3, Bösch examines first the relationship between the media, revolutions, and nationalism from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, focusing on the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, and the 1848 revolutionary upheavals in Germany, among other conflicts. Although a systematic comparative study is still missing, Bösch asserts the strong mutual influence between revolutions and

the media. In America, for instance, newspapers often exaggerated the existing conflicts between the authorities and the public, and they debated about the freedom of the press and a new political system, thus stirring up sentiment against the ruling elites. Moreover, “editorial offices formed the nucleus for protests in various revolutionary actions” (p. 63). The self-awareness of journalists likewise changed. In revolutionary France, journalists now saw themselves less as chroniclers and more as political educators and “investigative champions fighting against corruption and counter-revolutionary forces” (p. 65). Second, Bösch highlights the changes in the media landscape that took place during the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as the rise of illustrated magazines and cheap popular newspapers with large circulations; the development of new electronic media, such as the telegraph and the telephone; and the utilization of new forms of reproduction, like photography, the phonograph, and film. In particular, the telegraph and globally operating news agencies revolutionized the exchange of information and connected the different parts of the world by creating a greater awareness of foreign cultures.

Chapter 4 deals with the role of the mass media in the era of the two world wars. After outlining the development of the media market around 1900—involving the proliferation of gramophones, telephones, private cameras, film, and wireless telegraphy—Bösch delineates the role of the media during the First World War. In most countries the press supported the war more or less actively. Still, censorship regulations were introduced in almost all countries, although the degree of their rigidity varied, and governments sought to pursue an active propaganda policy by establishing press bureaus or ministries of information. After a brief glance at the “golden years of mass culture” during the 1920s (p. 113)—with the rise of radio and film as a global mass medium—and the relationship between politics and entertainment in the mass press in Weimar Ger-

many, the remainder of the chapter focuses on the role of the media in Fascist dictatorships before and during the Second World War. Although Bösch emphasizes developments in the sphere of press, radio, film, and newsreels in Germany and Italy, he also touches on other Fascist states, such as Spain and imperialist Japan.

Chapter 5 is devoted to media cultures during the Cold War with special reference to the establishment of television as the predominant mass medium of the period, making for a “global television age” (p. 155). Separate subchapters focus on developments in East Germany and the Soviet bloc, on the one hand, and in West Germany and Western Europe under American influence on the other. In Soviet-controlled East Germany, an “autonomous socialistic media model” evolved that differed from the right-wing dictatorships of the early and mid-twentieth century (p. 137): with a few exceptions, this media system, comprising press, broadcasting, news agencies, and cinema, was not merely directed and controlled by the government, but owned almost exclusively by the state or the Communist Party. In West Germany, by contrast, the media system was reconstructed with a view to establishing democracy. This involved the de-Nazification and decentralization of the press and the establishment of a pluralistic broadcasting system. The last part of the chapter traces the evolution of television as the most important mass medium worldwide since the mid-twentieth century that led to far-reaching changes in such areas as consumerism and social behavior. Still, as Bösch asserts, so far historians have done little research into the social, political, and cultural significance especially of German television: “The influence of television on family, on gender roles, politics, sports, culture, education and religious, social and national identities has hardly ever been studied” (p. 155). Moreover, television had a profound impact on “old media,” such as newspapers, broadcasting, and cinema, which now had to compete with television for the attention of the audience and were in need of re-

defining their roles. Bösch emphasizes the significance of television as a “historical storage medium” (p. 166), which not only produces historical sources by chronicling contemporary events but also uses its own, self-produced sources to recount history at a later point, thus decisively shaping the culture of remembrance.

In lieu of a conclusion, the epilogue, “The Internet Age from the Perspective of Media History,” offers an outlook into the relationship between media history and the Internet. Bösch argues that while the establishment of digital technologies and the Internet can be seen as a turning point in media history and has no doubt led to enormous societal changes, the development of computer-mediated communication did not occur as a sudden, revolution-style event: “Like many modern media, the computer owes its existence not to a single brilliant inventor, but developed more or less concurrently in several countries during the course of the 1940s, proving once again that media innovations are responses to prevailing social needs. In this case the starting point was the processing of complex data, followed by the need for information and communication” (p. 167). Bösch identifies a number of commonalities the computer and the Internet have with older media technologies and their social appropriation. First, wars and conflicts encouraged the expansion of new media but were seldom the originator of media innovation per se. Second, the manner of media utilization was determined less by technical innovations than by users’ needs and their cultural, social, and political orientations. Third, although the Internet is held to be both an expression and a catalyst for globalization, each new media innovation in the past had the quality of reducing the boundaries of time and space. Fourth, the interactive nature of the Internet—often conjured as a novelty—has historical precedents too, as interactivity was a basic element of many old media. Fifth, like the old media, the Internet displays gender-specific contents and uses; women use different functions of the Internet than men,

for example, for direct communication. At the same time, like older media, the Internet has expanded the possibilities of social participation and access to public spaces for women and minorities. Finally, although throughout history new media were often credited with the power to alter society and political power structures, the case of China demonstrates that media restrictions are still a reality for many people in today’s world that even the Internet cannot brush aside.

Given the introductory nature of the book, Bösch necessarily reduces his narrative to the most significant media innovations without going into every detail. However, he manages to provide a fascinating panorama of the emergence of new media over the course of more than seven centuries and their interaction with the social, cultural, and political conditions prevailing at different epochs. The book is not a “German media history” in the strict sense, but it does have strong comparative elements as well, offering a side glance on media developments in Europe, the United States, and Asia. Moreover, Bösch competently integrates the history of media evolution with societal interactions and ensuing social and political changes. He also renders a useful service to the reader in identifying hitherto neglected areas in media history and making suggestions for future research. One such area is gender. From the late seventeenth century onward, journals for a female audience were established across Europe, among them *The Ladies Mercury* (1693), the first women’s magazine of the world published in England. In England earlier than in other European countries or in the United States, women became editors and journalists of periodicals, articulating female opinions and inspiring other women to follow their role models. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, periodicals became an important vehicle for spreading the idea of female emancipation. Moreover, “the popular press helped to enhance the importance of women since publishers now discovered them as an important target group for the new sales mar-

ket” (p. 85). Finally, the number of female journalists writing for the general press (as distinct of women’s magazines) increased significantly. In England by 1911, 4 percent of newspaper owners and publishers and 15 percent of all writers were women. As Bösch states, “journalism gave women access to an academically and politically informed occupation and allowed them to participate in public life” (ibid.).

The volume is completed with an index and a comprehensive bibliography offering the most relevant and recent literature in the field, although, perhaps inevitably, the majority of titles are in German. In a few cases, the alphabetical listing in the bibliography is out of order, apparently a result of negligent copyediting. In contrast to the original German version, this English edition unfortunately does not offer additional resources online, such as primary sources or the bibliography. Notwithstanding this minor point of criticism, *Mass Media and Historical Change* is a well-written introduction to German media history within its international context and is equally suited for teaching and research purposes.

Notes

[1]. For information on these centers, see their websites: at the University of Sheffield, <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/journalismhistory>; at Aberystwyth University, <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/history/departmental-research-centres/centre-for-media-history/>; at the University of Kent, <http://www.kent.ac.uk/history/centres/war-propaganda-and-society/index.html>; at Bournemouth University, <https://research.bournemouth.ac.uk/centre/centre-for-media-history/>; at the University College Dublin, <http://www.ucd.ie/mediahis/>; at Macquarie University, <http://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-centres-groups-and-facilities/resilient-societies/centres/centre-for-media-history/>; and at Concordia University, <http://www.mediahistoryresearch.com/about/>.

[2]. See Michael Meyen, “Diagnose: Der Patient ist tot – vorerst,” in *Aviso: Informationsdi-*

enst der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 60 (April 2015): 3-4.

[3]. See the institute’s website, <http://www.presseforschung.uni-bremen.de/>; and Holger Böning, Aïssatou Bouba, Esther-Beate Körber, Michael Nagel, and Stephanie Seul, eds., *Deutsche Presseforschung: Geschichte und Forschungsprojekte des ältesten historischen Instituts der Universität Bremen. Mit einleitenden Beiträgen zur Bedeutung der historischen Presseforschung* (Bremen: edition lumière, 2013).

[4]. Frank Bösch, “Der neue Boom der Mediengeschichte,” in *Aviso: Informationsdienst der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* 60 (April 2015): 4-5.

[5]. See the center’s website, <http://www.zzf-pdm.de/site/1096/Default.aspx>.

[6]. Frank Bösch, *Öffentliche Geheimnisse: Skandale, Politik und Medien in Deutschland und Großbritannien 1880-1914* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009); Frank Bösch and Peter Hoeres, eds., *Außenpolitik im Medienzeitalter: Vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013); Frank Bösch and Patrick Schmidt, eds., *Medialisierte Ereignisse: Performanz, Inszenierung und Medien seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2010); Frank Bösch and Dominik Geppert, eds., *Journalists as Political Actors: Transfers and Interactions between Britain and Germany since the Late 19th Century* (Augsburg: Wißner, 2008); and Frank Bösch and Norbert Frei, eds., *Medialisierung und Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006).

[7]. Frank Bösch, *Mediengeschichte: Vom asiatischen Buchdruck zum Fernsehen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2011).

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