
Similarities & Differences Between Ancient Media & Modern Media in Tom Standage's "The Writing On The Wall"

In Tom Standage's "The Writing on the Wall", the introduction and the first three chapters encompass many similarities and differences between ancient media and the media we have today. Multiple differences between ancient media and media from Martin Luther's day of age is also shown throughout. Both the comparisons and contrasts in these three time periods clearly show the drastic change in media over time, as well as where it started and where it is currently, in our daily lives. Believe it or not, writing had initially developed in the accounting field way back in the Neolithic period.

Though this "writing" did not yet contain words, it was simply just symbols and other markings on clay tablets which is similar to a database record in modern media, although online instead of clay. Later, things such as ideograms, cuneiform writing, and hieroglyphic writing surfaced in Egypt. In these, you could write more complex texts using "styluses", which are still seen today in a more modern version, used for touch screen appliances. Then, letters soon became a prevalent idea in Egypt and Mesopotamia, which was fascinating because people could receive messages in physical form instead of solely spoken. This was truly the first piece of media that is still used today quite similarly to how it was used back then.

Although, the difference between ancient and modern letters were that instead of your recipient reading it to themselves, a scribe was to read it to them since literacy was rare in the early centuries. Literacy was much more common in Greece, "Greeks had the opportunity to create the first social-media culture, based on the exchange of written rather than spoken information"(Standage). However, Greek culture always had skepticisms on writing because they thought people would become "hearers" and would have substituted spoken word all together. Aristotle claimed, "spoken words are the symbols of mental experience, and written words are the symbols of spoken words". This type of criticism holds true today in the aspect of technology.

Critics of technology always claim that face to face conversations are much more important to have and speaking through technology is taking over the lives of everyone using it. Both criticisms rely on the opinion that spoken words are most valuable and it should stay that way as time goes on. However, criticism was not present in Rome, for the Romans had made a full transition into incorporating written words into their lives. With the multitude of literate scribes and messengers, copying and delivering became a much more simple task than before. "The Roman elite were well educated and highly literate; transport links were fast and reliable, at least by the standards of the ancient world", claimed Standage.

This launched the release of many news articles and public gossip to emerge for the first time. This is similar to the newspapers and magazines we still read now, involving the most recent news and gossip that is circulating. In these articles, they also incorporate common abbreviations or acronyms such as "SPD" which translates to "send many greetings". This we also still use today when we text or email anything nonformal in order to make it more

convenient. With the new simplicity, the Romans became infatuated with sending and receiving mail. The obsession was even mocked by others which takes place in today's society with people addicted to technology.

The Romans also had what was called an "acta" which was very close to what we would view as a newspaper. Although, the difference between them was that the acta only had one copy of each issue produced daily and they were also made by hand. That highly differs from our newspapers, where they are available to everyone and there are thousands made weekly with a printing press. They did have similar content though such as, important dates of holidays, festivals, births, and deaths. Books also became a popular aspect in Roman times and were passed from reader to reader using messaging and scribes. However, authors did not make any profit from these books unlike most do today as a career. They had to attract readers solely based off word of mouth such as recommendations, copying, dedications, and personal endorsements. Later in history, the "recitatio" was established and allowed authors to read their pieces aloud to groups. Some authors may have similar events today, such a book excerpts or book signings but nothing that would gain them as much popularity as the recitatio did for the Roman authors.

Graffiti soon became the next form of media to surface in Rome. Buildings in many Roman cities were covered with images, text, and advertisements from anyone who wanted to create them. This holds true today, since in all big cities, you can see graffiti on many of the walls you pass. It was not illegal in Roman times though and was almost seen as a courtesy. "Writing graffiti was not regarded as defacement in the way it is today, and people commonly wrote on the walls of their own houses and those of friends".

Everything changed when Martin Luther came into the picture. Luther was "horrified to discover that members of his congregation had been sold indulgences". He disliked the idea of selling indulgences because it did not seem faithful. He began to create letters, pamphlets, and most importantly, a list of ninety-five theses on his opinion. Unlike in more ancient times, there was never a piece of writing that had been this powerful and ultimately had the strength to exploit and ruin the Christian church such as Luther's did. The proposition had spread so rapidly and reached such a large audience no other writer had done before. This caused the copying process to occur at a much larger scale than it had in Rome as well. They were also much more concerned before they published it, about if the writing would sell. This all ignited the Reformation era immensely.

Luther continued to write Reformation pamphlets and news ballads and began to include images, which also differed from earlier periods. He also translated the New Testament into German so anybody could read and interpret it themselves. "Luther had given voice to the opposition to the church that had been simmering beneath the surface of European Society". As you can see, media has changed substantially from the start to what it is today. However, through the ancient period, Martin Luther's time, and modern day, some factors of the media still remain constant as well. This shows how important the initial ideas of media were but also how we expanded on them in order to create this modernized society we currently have. The similarities and differences between the time periods were clearly shown in "The Writing on the Wall" and overall prove the growth of media as a whole.