



Image from: [David Sarnoff in WDY radio station studio...](#) in [Encyclopedia of New Jersey](#)

Summary Article: **broadcasting**

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The transmission of sound and vision programmes by radio and television. Broadcasting may be organized under private enterprise, as in the USA, or may operate under a dual system, as in Britain, where a television and radio service controlled by the state-regulated British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) operates alongside commercial channels operating under franchises granted by the Independent Television Commission (known as the Independent Broadcasting Authority before 1991) and the Radio Authority.

In the USA, broadcasting is limited only by the issue of licences from the Federal Communications Commission to competing commercial companies; in Britain, the BBC is a centralized body appointed by the state and responsible to Parliament, but with policy and programme content not controlled by the state; in Japan, which ranks next to the USA in the number of television sets owned, there is a semigovernmental radio and television broadcasting corporation (NHK) and numerous private television companies.

Television broadcasting entered a new era with the introduction of high-powered communications satellites in the 1980s. The signals broadcast by these satellites are sufficiently strong to be picked up by a small dish aerial located, for example, on the roof of a house. Direct broadcast by satellite thus became a feasible alternative to land-based television services, including cable television. A similar revolution is taking place as digital television becomes widely available.

A royal charter and agreement govern the constitution, finances, and obligations of the BBC, which has a regional structure and provides 20,000 hours of regional and national broadcasting a year. In 1996, the BBC was substantially reorganized to strengthen its existing services and develop digital services. The franchising of cable television systems is carried out by the Programme and Cable Division of ITC.

A single digital cable can now provide hundreds of television channels, video-on-demand, home shopping and banking, security and alarm services, e-mail, and high-speed Internet access.

History Although television transmissions began shortly after the end of World War II, radio continued for several years to be the dominant medium. On the more serious side of broadcasting, the BBC's Third Programme (now Radio 3) began to present speech and music on a pattern which was speedily copied in other European countries and which aimed at the consistent treatment of the arts, philosophy, literature, and music. However, television soon began to expand its audience and to challenge radio. Radio reacted slowly to the competition, but it was soon exploiting its immediacy and flexibility as a medium for reporting and for making a new type of documentary made possible by light, portable tape recorders. Music, discussions, talks, quizzes, and magazine programmes were the staple of radio, which now left to television those large areas of entertainment, drama, and documentary which were better suited to visual presentation.

Technological developments The development of television programmes was greatly advanced by the adoption of light, portable equipment using 16-mm film; this gave news and current affairs reporting

a flexibility unknown with cumbersome 35-mm gear. This technical advance enabled news documentary programmes to develop a new kind of television journalism, recording events with sometimes horrifying immediacy. The development of portable video cameras and recorders brought the advent of electronic news gathering, while the introduction of satellite television made it possible to convey pictures from one side of the Earth to the other and, in due course, to the Earth from the Moon. Digital television will greatly expand the number of channels available.

Television drama In the field of drama, television advanced in two directions. Picking up the tradition of drama documentaries established by John Grierson and other British documentary film-makers, it developed a highly realistic genre. To perform in this type of drama, a new school of naturalistic acting evolved; directors and scriptwriters aimed at relevance to ordinary life and contemporary problems. From this a school of 'kitchen-sink' dramas emerged but was superseded by more socially conscious works in which documentary and fiction were mingled.

Interviews and satire The technique of television interviewing has been developed by interviewers to a point where politicians, the chief subjects, became alarmed at what they saw as an unwarranted sharpness of interrogation, while the broadcasters considered this style to be in the public interest. Relations with politicians were also troubled by satirical programmes.

The consumer Two areas of debate have been concerned with the concepts of accountability: the extent to which broadcasting organizations should be answerable to the public they serve, and the desire by members of the community to air their views without the intervention of television or radio producers in the role of censors and editors.

Broadcasting in the USA This began on a large scale in 1920. A number of stations were set up by various trading concerns, including manufacturers of radio apparatus, and by 1924 over 1,000 stations had been licensed. Programmes on US television and radio are sponsored by advertisers, who have considerable control over the content of the programmes; they may – and do – reject programmes they think might offend those members of the public whom they hope to persuade to buy their products.

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