

# Czego uczy nas historia gospodarcza?

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## Where did the media come from?

Dr Jarosław Kinal and Dr Joanna Jaroszyk

from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań talk together

**Jarosław Kinal:** Good morning to you, today it is my pleasure to host one of the podcasts carried out as part of the project "What does economic history teach us? 12 conversations for tough times". My guest today is Dr Joanna Jaroszyk from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and we are going to talk about the genesis of the media and the impact of the media on social life. Let's start with a simple question. Where did the media come from? What was the need for this institution?

Joanna Jaroszyk: Simply put, from the need for information. This is a need that has been with humanity since the dawn of time. The need to access information, the need to share this information, the need to exchange opinions. This is something that has accompanied mankind from the very beginning. However, until the media developed, and at such a mass stage, access to information was a kind of privilege. It was very limited, to a limited group of people, and this is why this basic need, unsatisfied earlier, was only satisfied by the media, first in the form of newspapers, then in the form of mass media such as radio, television, not to mention the stage we are in now, namely the expansion of the new media, where we can actually say that we are drowning in information, and sometimes we have a problem with appropriate selection of it.

**Well, Doctor, has technology had a significant impact on the development of the media?**

Of course it has, especially if we look at the way we consume media today. It wasn't so long ago that newspapers would include television supplements as supplements. And the viewer would sit down and sometimes even tick off the programmes he or she wanted to watch. Even before that, in the 1980s, this phenomenon in Poland, for example the first soap opera to be broadcast in Poland, Isaura's Slaves, meant that towns and villages actually became completely depopulated, because people had to sit down and watch an episode, because if they didn't, the opportunity was gone. At the moment we consume these media completely differently. We can choose where and when we watch an episode of a soap opera, or read some information, We have different sources of this information, in fact the telephone is already such a source that provides us with



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everything we need. We can watch, we can read, we can listen to podcasts, so these possibilities have changed in a way that is absolutely incomparable.

**Yes, it's just that the development of technology has created information overload. It used to be that you waited all day for a newspaper, half a day for information, news on TV, on the radio every hour, and now this information happens in a few milliseconds. How do you comment on this?**

We have a problem with the selection of information, because with this rush of information comes the difficulty of distinguishing truth from falsehood. This phenomenon of disinformation, which is actually on the increase, is a serious problem precisely because there are so many different channels through which this information reaches us.

**This is true, but also looking historically, we have had pro-prince and anti-prince newspapers, so this phenomenon of disinformation, I don't know if it is so new in our media market.**

The phenomenon itself, of course, is not new. In the past, however, it was much easier to distinguish between information coming from government channels and information reaching us from anti-government sources. Here the division was quite clear. In such political systems, where information was subject to control, the recipient was also able to distinguish between messages of a purely propagandist nature and those coming from other sources. At the moment this is all becoming blurred, and this is where the problem lies.

**Well, precisely because nowadays and also earlier, historically, the role of propaganda and the attempt to dress up this propaganda in the myth of independent media. This is also quite a problem, which is why I would like to ask you to cite some milestones in the development of the media and in the development of propaganda, if any such examples come to mind.**



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Milestones in the development of the media are closely linked to technological progress, because of course we can say, for example, that Herodotus, Tacitus or other ancient chroniclers were the first journalists and trace the origins of journalism back to ancient Rome, but in *fact* the development of journalism and the media, in the modern sense of the word, can only be traced back to the arrival of the printing press. That is to say, the revolutionary invention of Gutenberg's printing press meant that a text could be copied a thousand times faster than by a scribe by hand. However, we had to wait another 100 years for the development of the first newspaper, so the beginning of the 17th century is

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when the first newspapers appeared, but their heyday was the Age of Enlightenment, and it was then that the first ideas began to be formulated about how journalism and newspapers should look like. The next milestone was the 19th century, which is called the golden age of journalism for good reason. In connection with industrialisation and the emergence of the middle class, the late 1830s and early 1840s saw, perhaps not the full massification of the press, but a much wider audience, because those first newspapers were very elitist in character. On the other hand, the spread of education in the 19th century, the elimination of illiteracy, at least in our part of the world, led to a much greater impact of the press. The second half of the 19th century, with the advent of the single-penny press, meant that the press was able to reach a larger audience. The emergence of journalistic genres, the telegraph, in other words the acceleration of the transmission of information. This was also certainly revolutionary in terms of the development of the press and journalism. The 20th century, again more inventions. television, and finally the Internet. All these phenomena affected the speed of information transmission and led us to the situation in which we find ourselves today.

**Well, let's move on to the next topic. We have this rather interesting paradox, because the media shape societies, but societies also shape the media. How does this happen and does it happen at all?**

There are very many concepts here. Undoubtedly, the media influence societies. The first thing, the question of information selection. It is the media that decides what we are going to talk about, that is, what information is going to be given. Next, how we will talk about it. That is, the way we narrate, interpret these events. And this is undoubtedly the influence of the media. Of course, the more channels there are, the more difficult it is precisely to select this information. On the other hand, it is a fact that for some reason we discuss one topic and not another. And yet so many things are happening around us. As far as society's influence on the media is concerned, well, information is also a commodity and, therefore, when we have media companies, which are, well, companies, that is, they are in business for profit, they have to adapt to the tastes of their audience. This, of course, also has negative effects, namely, well, it doesn't always happen, not always, but it can be at the expense of the quality of this information that reaches us. It is said that the media strive to entertain us to death, i.e. the primacy of entertainment, sensational elements over such purely informative elements.

**This is true, and now if we can continue this thread, I would like to ask about the role of the media in shaping economic successes or economic failures. An example of**

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**big companies going bust after a press release. Do you have any thoughts or examples on this topic?**

In fact, it is difficult to make an unambiguous assessment of this kind, because sometimes we may wonder why a media campaign aimed at a certain enterprise, or the disclosure of various scandals, in one case contribute to its downfall, while in another they have no effect at all, or are overlooked somewhere. The same is true when it comes to influencing political decisions. We also have plenty of examples of information or criticism from the media concerning the actions of the government, the actions of individual politicians, which do not involve resignations or changes of any kind, but there are, and we know from history, situations when media information, usually preceded by some kind of reliable investigation, caused, for example, the president to resign from office, such as the Watergate affair.

**It is also puzzling that sometimes there is indeed such an impact, while in other cases there is absolutely no such social resonance or reaction from the authorities. I suppose this is a topic that should be further researched. There was also an interesting situation from the first days of Russia's war with Ukraine in 2022, when the media, mostly social media of course, not the mainstream media, themselves spread the news that petrol would disappear from petrol stations, that there would be no possibility of delivering money to ATMs, which caused a collective panic and also some economic bumps, as banks had to change their logistical system. Fuel suppliers had to change the rate of fuel delivery to meet the needs of consumers. At the same time, an information counterattack. Again in the media, that nothing so bad would happen. And the queues, I remember queue lists of 100 or 150 to take money out of an ATM.**

That's right. In general, money likes silence and therefore media hype or information about problems in a company can translate into, for example, a drop in the share price of a given company, which can directly affect the condition or future of that company. This is how it works, of course.



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**Also, media stereotypes make us trust banks less, because it is the media that very often show that, for example, in these banks, a deposit is lower in interest rate than a loan, so we calculate for ourselves what it looks like. The media also, again social media, again those, one could say, unnoticeable influencers, who we used to be able to call opinion leaders from Levi's, who are now shifting to journalistic, quasi-media functions, are in some way influencing our economy, our consumer choices. I recently came across data like this, that 80% of comments and product descriptions**

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**are false, generated by users who have never done it. This also shows, I don't know if you have encountered this, but the enormous power of the media in our even everyday choices of hoover, hair dryer, milk, candy bar or party drink.**

Of course. Advertising is a lever of commerce, well it's not a slogan that was invented yesterday.

**And advertising is taking up more and more space in the media, because also what you mentioned, they have to make a living from something.**

Correct.

**We have had economics, let's move on to social issues. Is the media the fourth power, or does the media only serve to support the first three powers?**

This is a very difficult question. Of course, this idea of a tri-partite government and the spread of the democratic system, the recognition of the role of the media in this system, has led to precisely the development of this idea of the media, which are to perform the function of a fourth power, which will be a form of exercising social control over the first three. And, of course, we know that this is theoretically possible only if the right conditions exist, that is, if we operate in a democracy. However, research shows that it is by no means the case that where there are free media, democracy will immediately function better. Neither is it to be said that the media must necessarily spoil democracy, but unfortunately there is no direct correlation of this kind. However, as far as the second part of the question is concerned, that is, the connection with the first, second and third authorities, this is quite dangerous. Putting the media in such a rather uncomfortable role. It is true that in the press law of 1984, which is still in force in Poland, the media are supposed to serve the society and the state, but it is commonly such a concept that is ridiculed, because it is either or. Rather, as it follows from certain ethical and deontological principles, the media are first and foremost supposed to serve the public, to defend the public against the temptations of the authorities. On the other hand, there is no doubt that every authority would love to take control over the media. In a democratic system this is restricted by constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and freedom to establish state enterprises, whereas in authoritarian or totalitarian systems there are no such restrictions and in fact then the media perform the function of a propaganda mouthpiece of the regime.

**We have the example of North Korea, where the supreme leader knows everything, visits a poultry farm one day and teaches farmers or ranchers how to raise chickens,**

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**and on the other hand goes to a precision missile factory the next day and calibrates the missiles so that he has the least amount of flare.**

Of course, creating the image of the father of the nation who knows best is an example familiar from many regimes, described many times. In such regimes, too, the key role for the authorities is to subject the media to very tight control, by means of preventive censorship, for example, or various mandatory publication orders, by means of controlling access to the journalistic profession, so that these tools are very numerous indeed.

## **Can access to the journalism profession be controlled today?**

Not nowadays, in a democratic system of course, and here this caveat is very important, because journalists, the journalistic community in general, is very reluctant to any kind of regulation. There were ideas, for example during the amendment of the press law at the end of the 1980s, to introduce a requirement that a journalist could only be a person with a university degree. There was a great outcry and a great deal of opposition from journalistic circles, who absolutely did not want this profession to be subjected to any kind of control. However, this control does, of course, exist in authoritarian systems or regimes. I also deal with the Spanish press and media, and there is an example from the history of Spain, from the times of General Franco's regime, where the condition of access to the profession of journalist was graduation from an appropriate school of journalism and registration. Paradoxically, as it turns out years later, this also had the side effect of producing genuinely well-educated journalists who had this craft very well mastered.

## **Perhaps this is some sort of prescription?**

I would not dare to recommend it.

**Let us stay with journalists. What was a journalist historically and who is a journalist today? What qualities, what skills should they possess? Is it just a scribe who observes reality or a commentator who broadcasts a narrative? Who was, who is a journalist? Because these, it seems to me, are two different characters, two different ideas.**

It's not quite, I wouldn't put it that way, because a journalist and the idea of the profession in general is that it's someone who is professionally engaged in informing in one way or another. Of course, in the heyday of journalism, you could say it was an elitist profession. Hence to this day we have such reminiscences in the form of such concepts or ideas as

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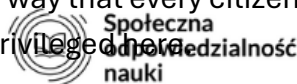
the mission of journalism, the special mission, the special role, the special role of the ethical principles that should guide this journalist, the skills. Here, too, we have a whole set of qualities that a journalist should have. However, the problem of this profession, and not from today, not from yesterday, is this progressive precarisation. So we have, as it were, two worlds. We have the world of star journalists and we have the world of those media workers who are often employed on junk contracts, civil law contracts, who are poorly paid and have no guarantees for their employees, which also affects the quality of their work. Many studies and analyses have been written on the situation of journalists and on how their living conditions and insecurity affect the quality of their work.

**I also remember this idea of a journalist card, which gave certain privileges to contemporaries. I don't think this journalist card is such a key that opens all doors at all.**

It is not the key that opens all the doors, nor is membership of journalistic associations, which is not obligatory. Journalists are not, the profession is not a corporation, there are no obligations in the form of just belonging to an association of one kind or another, by the way there are probably several of these associations at least. And therefore, well, this has its pros and cons, because membership in a corporation also gives some kind of protection from that corporation, if it functions properly. On the other hand, if you don't belong, you theoretically have more freedom and liberty, which journalists also care about, but on the other hand, you can only count on yourself.

**This is true.**

Also, if I may mention one more thing, the rules have changed a little bit, because the press law until a certain point had such a provision, which established information privilege for journalists, that is, they had priority access to information. Now the rules are structured in such a way that every citizen has the right to access public information and journalists are not privileged here.



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**Is that good or bad?**

That is good, that is good. Of course, it hasn't changed much in practice because journalists are professionally in the business of getting information and disseminating that information, whereas every citizen, and I guess that's also the idea of a democratic state that operates on the principles of openness, equality, that every citizen should have the right to access that information.

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**Well, yes, but then any citizen, given the right skills and tools, can become a journalist.**

We do not have a definition of a journalist. We do not know who a journalist is. There are many such definitions in theory, in science. However, we could really define it in a very simple way. A journalist is someone who is employed as such. For example, a person who conducts information activities in a professional manner, for example, because there is no obstacle to the author of a blog, which appears regularly and which is engaged in passing on information and opinions, being a journalist. He will be a journalist, which entails a number of legal obligations.

**This is something to be aware of.**

Yes, if we recognise that a medium, because it doesn't matter whether it is online or in print, it doesn't matter at the moment. If we consider that it is a journal or a magazine, then it should be registered, which not many people realise, but such court rulings already exist with such content. If someone runs a blog of this nature, well, then they necessarily become a journalist.

**We have just started with 'or magazine', these used to be very important two words that actually changed the electoral orientation on the Polish political scene. We have several such examples of media actions that have changed societies' decisions. They even changed the functioning of society. We have Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds*, which was a simple radio recording, a reading that caused a panic attack in New York State. We have Kapuscinski's *Football War*, with which the media turned up the heat on two antagonistic nations. Finally, we have Watergate, we have just that famous 'or magazines'. How did the media influence major historical events?**

Well, the fact that we are able to calculate, maybe not on the fingers of one hand, but on all the fingers we have, this influence means that it is perhaps a little overestimated. It all depends on the circumstances, I have that impression. I mentioned earlier that sometimes some media information goes completely unnoticed, other times it actually has a certain effect. Here we could also give more examples of information or journalistic investigations, the disclosure of which resulted in some kind of action, such as the issue presented in the film 'Spotlight', i.e. a journalistic investigation conducted in Boston, which revealed the scale of paedophilia in the church, which was later translated into specific decisions. The Watergate affair, which, as we know, had an effect and which also translated into legislative changes, which meant that the activities of the secret services



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had to be characterised by greater openness and transparency. There was also the question of media activity in general, or the activity of journalists and reporters earlier, during the Vietnam War. How this activity changed the perception or attitude of the public towards this war. So these are indeed such watershed moments, but there would have to be a favourable social climate for this information to fall on the right ground. This is my conviction. because we have examples of indeed disclosures that do not have any great results.

**And at the same time we have great examples of how a journalist became a star. Kim Philby, or Ernest Hemingway, who after all started out as war correspondents. For those not familiar with the person, Harald "Kim" Philby is one of the greatest Soviet agents who operated in Britain. Ernest Hemingway, an eminent writer. They started out in journalism.**

In fact, I will cite the example of Spain, where, although the Republicans, the defenders of the Republic, lost the war, they proved to be moral victors, thanks in part to the fact that they had public opinion, the world opinion, on their side, thanks to the activity of outstanding reporters, outstanding journalists, who reported in a pro-Republican manner on the course of the war. Here, too, the perception of certain events is certainly influenced by these great journalistic figures. Oriana Fallaci also had such an impact.

**Here, too, the media show us certain events in a certain perspective, they give their narrative. Here, too, we must remember that underneath the guise of pure information there are very often certain interests that are concealed. These can, of course, be national interests, resulting from ethnocentrism, or simply national interests resulting from a certain strategy of promoting our country, our nation, our economy. This is also quite an interesting issue.**

I agree that it is difficult to say to what extent the state has the ability to create this information agenda at the moment. Of course, through the media, which it controls or influences to some extent, of course. However, at the moment we are at a stage in the development of the media where they are international in nature and serve the interests of, precisely, the question is: who? It is probably not the interests of the state.

**Therefore, as Marshall McLuhan said, the role of these public media is very important. Well-run, well-managed, independent public media that look after the interests of the community.**

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Yes, except that there are very few public media that operate independently. Our experience, for example, is not the best. However, the temptation for the authorities to subjugate the media to themselves is indeed enormous and, in fact, there are no proper legal mechanisms to guarantee this independence, and if we do not have legal mechanisms, we are really only dependent on the goodwill of those in power.

**Well, yes, and on the other hand, the example of the United States, where public PBS has a very residual audience because they have been thrown into the free market and that is a major problem. It is always the viewer who chooses what is attractive, not what is mission-driven. Although mission can sometimes be attractive too. Finally, Doctor, a simple question. What does the future hold for the media?**

Different visions are being floated, very pessimistic visions, optimistic visions, which is also nothing new. When radio appeared, well, for newspapers it was interpreted as a threat to their existence. It turned out that this coexistence was possible, just like with television. Then the Internet appeared, and as soon as it did, voices were raised that this was the end, the death of the traditional media, above all the press, within the next few years. And what turned out? Of course, the circulation of the printed press is steadily declining and will probably continue to do so, but the leading press titles have found their feet in the digital environment and have made a good start in social media, which are increasingly becoming a source of information. The basic challenge is simply to keep up with these trends.

**And remembering the main role of the media, which is to show and seek the truth.**

Correct.

**I would like to conclude on this note. Thank you very much, Doctor, for an interesting talk.**



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