

MASS MEDIA

Pillars of the “information-oriented society”



Newspapers and magazines

Newspapers and magazines on sale in a station kiosk. (Photo courtesy of AFLO)

Freedom of speech and the press is guaranteed by the constitution of Japan as a fundamental human right. Japan's high literacy rate and its people's thirst for new and stimulating information has sustained the mass media's appeal.

In the past several decades, advances in computer and digital-communications technology have brought many changes to existing print and broadcast media while also creating a brand new mass media in the form of the Internet-based World Wide Web.

Newspapers

It was in 1868 that newspapers covering domestic news appeared in Tokyo, Osaka,

Kyoto and Nagasaki, though not on a daily basis. Then, in 1871, the first daily newspaper, the *Yokohama Mainichi Shimbun*, was launched. Others followed in rapid succession. Most of today's major daily newspapers have a history going back to the 1870s.

Today's newspapers are central members of huge media conglomerates, often affiliated with television networks, professional sports teams, and other businesses. In 2012, the average household subscribed to 0.88 newspapers. Major general newspapers usually put out both morning and evening editions (except on Sundays), with more than 90 percent of these newspapers being delivered directly to homes. In addition to the general newspapers, there are sports newspapers, political party newspapers, tabloids, industry-specific trade newspapers, and leisure-oriented newspapers.

The five largest daily general papers are circulated in local editions nationwide and account for more than 50% of all newspapers sold. In the order of their circulation, they are *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, and *Sankei Shimbun*. All these organizations maintain overseas bureaus, and several of them now use communications satellites to transfer digital data that is utilized to print daily overseas editions. Many regional cities and towns have their own newspapers to report local news.

At first, newspapers were sold on consignment in bookstores, but the practice of home delivery, a system started by the *Hochi Shimbun* in 1903, soon followed. In 2012, 95% of newspapers were delivered directly to homes and offices from 18,367 delivery agents with 367,809 employees throughout the country. By contrast, newsstand sales accounted for less than 5% of total sales. Another system peculiar to Japan, the appointing of exclusive dealerships that act both as distribution agents and subscription salesmen, became widespread after 1930 and remains in effect today. These systems sustain the high circulation of newspapers in Japan.

In addition to the newspaper organizations, two news agencies, Kyodo News Service and Jiji Press, maintain domestic and overseas bureaus and share coverage with foreign wire services.

Japan has three English-language daily newspapers: *The Japan Times*, *The Daily Yomiuri*, and *International Herald Tribune/The Asahi Shimbun*. Some foreign newspapers print editions in Japan, and others are air freighted from overseas; they can be found in major hotels and bookstores and at a few of the kiosks at urban railway and subway stations.

However, with the increasing use of the Internet and cell phones, the number of newspaper subscribers is decreasing, especially among young people. The population of Japan is also on a downward trend, which has likewise contributed to a decline in newspaper sales.

There has also been a decrease in the number of newspaper advertisements, which has forced the newspaper industry to

transform its style of business.

Books and Magazines

In 2010 approximately 78,000 books and magazines were published in Japan, with total copies amounting to about 4.7 billion.

Newly published books cover a wide range of fields. By category, social science and literature each represent about one-fifth, followed by fine arts, technology and industry, natural science, history, and books for children. In terms of sales, popular literature such as historical novels and mysteries, which are mainly favorites of the middle-aged, overwhelms all other genres.

A tremendous variety of magazines are published in Japan on a weekly, biweekly, monthly, and quarterly basis. Many of the magazines are produced by major newspapers and book publishing houses, others by magazine specialty houses, and still others by independent organizations or special interest groups.

Weekly magazines were originally published primarily by newspaper companies, but book publishers began to enter the field in February 1956, with the launching of *Weekly Shincho*. The weeklies enjoy wide circulation and provide an alternative to the more staid reporting of daily newspapers. Their contents run the gamut: everything from political scandals to gossip about media personalities and sensational crime stories. Affectionately referred to as “guerrilla journalism,” they frequently find it necessary to defend their own freedom of the press as guaranteed by the constitution.

While general magazines such as *Bungei Shunju*, *Chuo Koron*, *Sekai*, and other long-established monthlies maintain a high reputation and are sought out by educated people, fashion magazines aimed at a younger female readership, such as *With* and *More*, also enjoy wide circulation. In recent years, magazines have become more focused in their contents, appealing to specific age groups and people with specialized interests, such as collectors, sports enthusiasts, and personal computer

users. Reflecting the steady rise in the average age of the population, the number of new magazines targeting middle-aged and elderly people is growing. Japanese editions of foreign magazines are also a part of the market, one example being the Japanese-language version of *Newsweek*, which has been published since 1986. Going the other way, in recent years a number of Japanese magazines have established overseas editions, primarily targeting young female readers in China and South Korea.

Comic magazines and books known as *manga* are very popular among both young people and adults. The market for *manga* is enormous, accounting for 24.2% of total sales and 39% of all copies sold in 2010. Spurred by the global popularity of Japanese animation, a growing number of stories featured in Japanese *manga* are being translated into foreign languages and published abroad. The U.S. monthly comic magazine *Shonen Jump* runs translated stories from *Shonen Jump*, a weekly Japanese *manga* with a circulation of 2.9 million, as of June 2010.

Although still very small in absolute terms, the electronic book market is growing rapidly. A number of services offer electronic books formatted for reading on personal computers and personal digital assistants (PDA), and in 2003 a new service was introduced that distributes fiction and other electronic books for reading on cellular telephones.

Broadcasting

Radio broadcasts in Japan date from 1926, but until the end of World War II they were monopolized by the government-affiliated Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK:Japan Broadcasting Corporation). A new broadcasting law that came into effect in 1950 resulted in NHK being reorganized as a special corporation that is neither state-operated nor private. Unlike private companies, NHK's activities are subject to restrictions by the government. Decisions regarding programming and other matters are made by the Management Commission, a

governing body whose members are appointed by the prime minister after obtaining the Diet's approval. NHK radio and television do not broadcast commercial advertising. About 98% of operating revenues are obtained from monthly viewer fees.

NHK television made its debut in Tokyo in February 1953. In August of the same year, the first commercial broadcast station, an affiliate of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, began broadcasts.

In its first few years, television was a luxury commodity that only a few could afford, and large crowds would often gather around television sets set up in front of railway stations and other places for a chance to watch *sumo* wrestling and other sports events. Within five years of its introduction, the number of registered owners of television receivers passed the 1-million mark. When color broadcasts began in September 1960, sales rose rapidly. By 1962, ownership of color and black-and-white models had increased tenfold, to over 10 million—just under half of the country's households. The Tokyo Olympics in 1964 further accelerated the growth in television set ownership.

Whereas in the late 1950s, the so-called "three sacred treasures" of household consumer goods were black-and-white televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators, the new "three sacred treasures" during the period of economic growth became color televisions, air conditioners, and automobiles. Japanese color televisions, renowned for their high quality, became one of Japan's main export items as their technical capabilities rose year after year. Japan has also contributed innovative new technologies to the world, including its experimental broadcasts of the world's first sound multiplex system, beginning in 1978, and the development of the world's first plasma display televisions in 1992. Today Japan still leads the world in TV technologies, including 3D televisions and organic EL displays.

The development of information technologies has set the stage for the convergence of broadcast media and telecommunications, which until now have been two discrete sectors. The launch of "one-segment broadcasts" in 2006, which let



viewers watch TV on their mobile phones, is one example.

Satellite and Digital Broadcasting

Full-scale NHK broadcast satellite (BS) broadcasts began in 1989 with two channels. In 1991 Japan's first commercial BS channel, called WOWOW, was introduced. Analog format communications satellite (CS) broadcasts began in 1992, and digital CS broadcasts were started by PerfectTV (now SKY PerfecTV) in 1996. In December 2000 BS digital broadcasts began with 10 television channels as well as radio and data transmission channels.

Terrestrial digital television broadcasting allows large volumes of different information such as sound, images and text to be sent at one time by compressing the image or sound signal. This not only improves the quality of the functions such as image and sound that analog television already provides, but allows new services to be provided, as well. In addition to clear and detailed high-definition images and high-quality sound, the Japanese standard "ISDB-T" (Integrated Services Digital Broadcasting—Terrestrial) allows transmission of text data which form subtitles for news, weather or traffic information; simultaneous transmission of multiple programs on one channel; interactive television and so on. The text data transmission allows elderly viewers or people with disabilities to easily access essential information. Simultaneous transmission allows the broadcasting of scheduled programs at the same time as live broadcasts from a sporting facility if the sporting event over runs its time slot. Interactive television allows the viewers to participate in television programs via an Internet connection. ISDB-T with its many useful features is being introduced not only in Japan but also across the globe.

In Japan, cable television companies have been gradually switching to digital television broadcasting since 1998. Some private TV companies and the Japanese public TV company NHK began digital television broadcasting in 2003. In July 2011, analog broadcasting was shut down with the

exception of certain prefectures affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March of that year.

In 2012, Tokyo Skytree, the world's tallest, 634 meters, free-standing broadcasting tower, went into commercial operation, strengthening the transmission capabilities of digital terrestrial television broadcasting and one-segment digital broadcasting for mobile terminals.

The Internet and the World Wide Web

Commercial Internet service providers appeared in Japan in 1993. It is estimated that Internet users numbered 96.5 million and the Internet penetration rate was 79.5% in 2012. Two factors that have significantly increased the Internet user population are the start of cellular telephone access services, which occurred in December 1999, and the fact that Japan has the most inexpensive broadband access fees in the world. In 2012 85.9% of all households had broadband access, among which 54.8% had fiber-based services. Broadband is rapidly gaining ground, fueled by the growing use of fiber optics.



Digital broadcasting
(Photo courtesy of Japan Broadcasting Corporation)