



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

LEARNING LAYER

The right ages of communication?

The author offers his own version of the four ages of communication: visual, language, mass media and digital. Previous scholars have divided the history of human communication differently. Below are the Ages of Human Literacy as discussed by Marshall McLuhan in 1967 and later referenced by Neil Postman.

Oral Age: Communication, particularly storytelling, was done by word of mouth. Stories survived when they were remembered within a community.

Literary Age: Symbols and then written language radically altered the communication environment. With writing, the same message could easily be repeated exactly and transported without distortion over a long distance.

Print Age: Mass production of printed materials began due to the development of the modern printing press — moveable metal type used in an old wine press. Identical messages can reach large numbers of people, though less community interaction is needed to consume media.

Electronic Age: A time of instant communication. First was the telegraph, then the telephone, then radio, television, computers, video games, the Internet and mobile phones. Before the Internet, McLuhan used the term Global Village to illustrate that humans were no longer in isolation. This age is also characterized by technological convergence, the tendency of different technologies to evolve toward performing similar tasks.