

Assignment 1-Media and Society

Media and Society

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The face and definition of media has evolved over the past twenty-five years more than any other time in history. We have moved into a society inundated with a buffet of media and content. This, in and of itself, presents positive and negative consequences. Receivers can feast on most any information from a handheld device. From a positive viewpoint, Estrin and Gill (2019), point out content can quickly and cheaply be created and distributed globally by anyone. Looking back to the 1994 MCI commercial starring Anna Paquin, she declares, “the information superhighway is the road to connect all global points” (Frith, 2018). Our quick access to information is an important source of employment and education (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). However, this evolution of speed and breadth comes with a price. We have enormous bits of digital pollution that have become detrimental to our well-being (Estrin & Gill, 2019).

The Good, the Bad, the Ugly

While traditional media such as newspapers, magazines and television programming still exist, the internet provides a far greater reach at a reduced financial cost; however, there is a cost. Tools intended for positive social engagement, collaboration and networking have been harnessed into traps to commit crimes, distribute pornography and solicit terrorist (Estrin & Gill, 2019). These changes threaten our culture and our value system. There are studies and concerns over increased online threats and bullying, video game addiction, human trafficking, and an overall inability to focus. Dangers such as these extend beyond the screen and envelop our mental chemistry.

One of the consequences of the vast databases of knowledge is the onset of artificial intelligence and the lack of a plan in how to wrangle it (Estrin & Gill, 2019). With each click and scroll, information is gathered without a way to audit the vulnerabilities of how it may be used. Without proper guidance and training end-users put themselves in harm’s way. Algorithms are

used for commercial purposes without controls or management, and as they advance in intelligence, social issues increase. The need for engagement has superseded value-based content and as a society we have become dependent on the instantaneous rush of information.

The ability to quickly upload content and extend all borders is responsible for increasing global e-commerce (Huffman, 2018). However, there is a distinct division in access and training that has created a gap among classes. If we look to history, we are reminded during the Middle Ages, it was primarily the priests and upper class who had access to education and could read and write (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Much like the divide of that period, we see a separation of societal classes, and if it is not addressed, it will create a widening of the classes. Without adequate equipment, internet access and training, a new digital language allows one group to evolve, while the other group is suppressed. Amidst the pandemic of 2020, as educators and students moved learning online, thousands of students will feel the gap. Many students living at the poverty level have no access to computers. Others living in remote or rural areas do not have reliable internet access. Public and private schools do not have adequate resources to penetrate the deficit. Administrators scramble to develop a plan to provide education for these students. We are living in a historic deepening of the digital divide.

Understanding Media Literacy

It is important to understand media literacy which includes both the role and power media has in our society (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). By understanding who owns the media, what agenda or purpose they have and what actions are expected by their content, we can better make independent decisions. Just as the development of mass media during the Industrial Age was about creating profits from the mass markets, much of today's digital media uses algorithms to target personal preferences for economic growth.

Cluttered Content of the Future

Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015), pose the question of whether media created culture or culture creates media. From the storytellers of Beowulf to the social media platforms of Zuckerberg, and throughout the ages, media and society have always evolved and adapted. While our models have changed to view information workers as those who create, process and store information, we must acknowledge that we are all information workers. In contrast to historical Agriculture and Industrial societies where only storytellers or reporters shared the news, the line has blurred and today everyone has a potential voice. The internet, faster access, and handheld devices have all played a part in the development of an information society. As technology evolves and media ownership changes, so does our culture. We have seen developments in how we communicate over the past 20 years equal to that of a hundred years prior. If this speed and breadth continues, the trajectory for the future is for digital overload. Efforts will have to be made to control the clutter, harassment, misinformation and foul uses associated with digital media (Estrin & Gill, 2019). These issues are not completely unstoppable, however, as a society, we must discern what amount is tolerable in relation to the benefits of instant global information. If controls are not set, we may end up adapting to technology, rather than technology and media adapting to humankind.

Forms of media have evolved from an orator telling a story on a hillside in ancient Athens, to an entrepreneurial gamer live-streaming and narrating himself from his parent's basement in Toledo on social media. Communication is still exchanging meaning, even if the meaning is not profound, according to Scharrer and Ramasubramanian, (2015). Everyone has a message. Today media allows us to share information worldwide with a single keystroke. This

transformation of media has provided a source of employment, income, and increased education for many, however, if we do not address the digit divide between those with access and training and those without, we will see a gap like that of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, media literacy must bring about awareness of mental health and addiction to digital content. The reliance on digital platforms and social media for information and connectedness is prevalent. One of the considerations we have going forward is who will be responsible for managing content and what is done with it. As a society, we must decide if culture is following media or if media will adapt to culture and in doing so, we must discern the value of content over clutter, noise and harm.

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