The Impact of Social Media on Knowledge Culture

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ABSTRACT

Culture is not static and technological innovations have greatly changed culture throughout history, no more so than in recent years. Modern culture is very much influenced and defined by recent technology and media use, primarily through social media applications such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat and Twitter. Although use and impact vary around the world, globalization brings this cultural change into wider and faster channels. Social media has transformed the way people interact and learn in local, national and international terms as well as evolving new social practices. Echo chambers, filter bubbles, and fake news dominate the internet and people’s lives, determining and even limiting the content of learning that people are exposed to on social media platforms. This, in itself, channels cultural practice into homogenized tranches creating a cyclical influence which feeds back into evolving technology. This article sets out to discuss the current cultural impact of social media, its limitation on learning and surface the ethical issues surrounding its use.

KEYWORDS
Culture, Ethics, Knowledge, Learning, Social Media, Technology

INTRODUCTION

Over years of development there has been an increasing impact on societal culture from media sources (Parry, 2011). Interestingly, few cultural models embrace technological influence on cultural practice despite its increasing power.

Historical perspectives of the media show the evolution of this impact (Conboy, 2002). In the 17th century, print media and public speech was in great demand by the middle classes (Gitelman, 2006). In the 1830s, the invention and rise of the penny press allowed newspapers to be printed more cheaply and contain more entertaining stories, beginning the rise of tabloids opening access for the less well-off and creating a new mass audience of a very different class (Lule, 2016). Then, with electronic communication, beginning with the telegraph, a more imminent and immediate access to news and other cultures developed (Briggs & Burke, 2001). These changes in media have had social and cultural consequences. This was the beginning of a world of media open to everyone, allowing for more of the population to access the same material and join together in a larger cultural system.

The popular press is both central to people and people are central to the popular press. The popular press has adjusted to different cultures and times to accommodate the different interests

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of people, business and politics (Conboy, 2002). As this evolved into more technical media in the 1920’s print media had to adapt as television and radio took center stage. Old forms of the media do not wither but instead evolve and continue to be central in day to day culture (Parry, 2011). In the early 20th century, film and radio were extremely popular, allowing the masses to listen to the same event simultaneously and at this time, these inventions helped to forge a certain cultural lifestyle that seemed to be increasingly influenced by consumerism. In America, for instance, there were three major networks controlling ninety percent of the news and shows, with critics of the time warning that television would heavily influence cultural norms and create a more homogenous society (Lule, 2016). Beyond this media influence is evident globally in the commercial breaks on TV, the advertisements littering Facebook pages, and the universally recognized commercial brands which have become household names.

Historically, people had to wait for delivery of the post and international phone calls were only for the wealthy, but now speedy, international access is taken for granted, so much so that we now expect instant responses from people and ourselves. People have so many global opportunities at their fingertips and friends well beyond local and national boundaries (Greenfield, 2014). In the past, this level of access and speed could not be imagined, but the technological advance has had an impact on emerging a new, modern culture (Jackson, 2008). In modern society, media therefore needs to be greatly considered as an important element of cultural make up and when theorizing the component parts of cultural change because media is, in effect, actually changing culture. The effects of social media allowing people to instantly communicate with others around the world and be aware of and absorb their different cultures, have to be considered within culture change theory because of their consequences, in addition to noting that the technology also creates new social habits in itself in its day to day use.

FACTS AND FORM

Media and technological developments, from the radio to the television, have changed the ways in which people interact and receive news and therefore, how they think about themselves as well as how they perceive the rest of the world. In April 2018 over four billion people were online, now exceeding over half of the world population, (Statista, 2018). More and more people are online and more mobile than ever before (Nahai & Harlow, 2012). In 2014, every minute of every day, three billion internet users around the world sent 204 million emails, uploaded 72 hours of new YouTube videos, made over 4 million Google searches, shared 2,460,000 pieces of Facebook content, downloaded 48,000 apple apps, spent $83,000 on Amazon, tweeted 277,000 messages, and posted 216,000 new Instagram photos (Keen, 2015). Now the figure of online users has increased to four billion, only three years later, these statistics become overwhelming. Indeed, 269 billion e mails were sent and received in 2017 and this is expected to rise to 333 billion by 2022, (Statista, 2018).

Internet usage has increased enormously with more people reliant and addicted to social media. On average, people spend two times more time on Facebook than exercising (Lowisz, 2014). This is a cultural shift. In the past, media has permeated life with newspapers and television programs, but those were limited and often at set times, but now, people have access to information and each other constantly, something that has never happened before.

In September 2012, an earthquake hit Costa Rica, taking 60 seconds to travel 250 kilometers. Thirty seconds after it hit the epicenter of Managua, someone tweeted “temblor”, making the news of this earthquake travel around the world instantly (Nolan, 2012). Social media was so prevalent by then that someone thought to tweet while experiencing an earthquake, rather than focusing on making sure they were safe. This shift has had a tectonic impact on current cultural norms.

Culture forms the basis of behavior, thoughts, and feelings in addition to shaping the social norms people adhere to. In this globally connected world, people are no longer exposed to only elements within their own culture, but to cultures both near and far (Nahai & Harlow, 2012). The widening
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