

Mass Media

- Communication intended to reach large group/groups of people (i.e. general public)
- Features of new media
 - o Forms of new media are digital, with communication broken up into digital bits and bytes and distributed throughout internet, reducing costs for communication
 - o Potential for **personalisation** through the algorithmisation of media
 - o People have ability to share and distribute a lot of information about themselves and their lives, including personal information

1. Greater spread of information and perspectives

- a. The interconnectedness of the internet has allowed people to have greater access to information from across the globe and broaden their perspectives. The internet allows us to have access to have constant access to digital information, allowing us to read up about a plethora of topics available. Sports, Politics, Business, the list of possible topics goes on. With 69% of people worldwide accessing news through their personal devices, it is evident that the internet plays a huge role in keeping people updated of social issues. This is especially due to the convenience and speed of using the internet, allowing us to find relevant information at a moments' notice. Through keeping updated of these issues, many of which are from other countries, we can learn about news that we would otherwise not have been able to access
- b. Fall of governmental censorship and greater transparency
 - i. Despite China trying to deny the original severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Chinese Doctor Li Wenliang was able to spread a warning to the rest of the world before he was ultimately killed by the virus.
- c. Greater access to perspectives from different sources around the world

2. Social Media and Psychological Health

- a. Result of status conferral – coverage of the press and the media signifies importance of the target audience. As a result, many individuals and groups go to extreme measures to get media coverage for themselves and their causes
- b. People often post idealised, heavily-filtered and carefully edited photos of their work, meals, pets, holidays, friends and families. Owing to humans' natural instinct to be competitive and envious, we often find ourselves feeling inadequate and inferior when surrounded by such idealistic images.
- c. Research by University of Pittsburgh supports this, highlighting that those who spend up to 2h a day on social media were twice more likely to feel inadequate and insecure than those who spent 0.5h.
- d. Social media provides us with the illusion of companionship, serving as a substitute to real friends and family. This is known as 'phubbing', the act of upstaging someone in real life in favour of virtual connections.
- e. As a result, as found by research from CMU, people who interacted directly with friends on Facebook felt greater contentment and happiness, however, it often resulted in greater feelings of unhappiness and isolation when the interaction became passive.

3. Cancel Culture

- a. Ostracisation of a person or group being called out for something they said or did that is not politically correct, often from digging back far in the past
- b. Goes against ideals of freedom of speech → social media often overreacts to small issues and goes far overboard with reactions as people have the freedom to do anything behind a wall of anonymity
- c. Online vigilantes often take things into their own hands with cancel culture, through the use of death threats against people's families and friends → often

with no checks and balances and dish out far exaggerated punishments for small issues

- d. One example of this is famous author J.K. Rowling, who spoke up for women's rights against the growing transgenderism movement. In response, many online began cancelling and boycotting her and saw her receiving hate and death threats.
- e. Another example is Adam Rubenstein, a New York Times writer who argued for the perspective that the federal government should utilise the military to quell violence in cities after large-scale protests following the death of George Floyd. Owing to the public backlash, he was forced to resign and stop publishing news.
- f. Could even have no real/misleading basis behind it: 'Aunt from Hell' incident where Jennifer O'Connell was heavily criticised on social media for filing a lawsuit against her 8 year old nephew who accidentally broke her arm when running to her to hug her. Reality: loophole in Connecticut law that meant she had to sue the 'perpetrator liable' in order to receive insurance coverage

4. Censorship Issues

- a. "Ignorance and apathy are on their side"
- b. Journalist Helani Gelpaya surveying Indonesians and Phillipinos in 2014 and found that more people were using Facebook than the internet – seemingly fully relying on Facebook as a search engine. By avoiding net neutrality – Facebook increased its usership by huge amounts and has the capability to dictate everything seen by users.
- c. Some examples of these are Google, Yahoo, and Youtube, search engines that have become extremely normalised in our lives – with over 30% of the global population regularly uses Youtube, signifying a near monopoly on the market for online videos. While these are certainly convenient, it has led to the rise of the phenomenon where people merely read the first few search results. In fact, over half of all Google searches only reading through the articles that were the first 3 search responses. Thus, our perspective of the world is largely up to the results of these search engines. Contrasting between 500-800 shows or movies on TV, Youtube receives over 300 hours of video every minute – leading to whatever viewership being to the very tip of the iceberg of youtube content. As such, most become reliant on the Youtube algorithm to redirect them to the relevant content they may be interested in watching.
 - i. Could even create natural biases in content, Youtube channel Veritaseum, a highly influential channel with over 10 million subscribers and a billion views once stated that creators like themselves often have to follow closely with what the Youtube algorithm promotes in order to keep themselves relevant – even for something as silly as snail videos.
- d. As a result of people using social media for hate and wrongdoing, many of the organisations behind these engines began instilling censorship against some users. However, what constitutes as speech encouraging hate, violence, and discourse is subjective and left up for these organisations to decide, often resulting in these large corporations using their huge liberty and influence to exert their political agenda.
- e. One example of this is the case of Youtube against 'Prager University', an online non-profit educational media company that creates short videos about global issues such as history and politics. From 2016 to 2021, more than 100 educational videos about simple topics like the 10 Commandments and Israeli history were censored and categorised in the restricted list, solely due to its conservative-leaning nature, disagreeing with the ideologies of the company. This meant that the videos were classified similar to pornography and

extreme violence, something that many people with family friendly filters would not even have access to. Furthermore, the youtube algorithm would also not promote such content. This resulted in an effective censorship, given that few look beyond the first few search results, many would not be exposed to information about such topics.

- f. As these large corporations begin censoring politically sensitive topics, the perspectives of viewers becomes restricted to what these large corporations want them to see, resulting in narrower perspectives.

5. Confirmation Bias/Echo Chambers

- a. The accessibility and interactive nature of the internet has led to the rise of digital echo chambers, which is the mechanism where a group with similar beliefs concur and reinforce their opinions. On the internet, one can easily find like-minded people with similar beliefs as their own, with simple searches for supporting articles, research, blogs or forums. Owing to confirmation bias, it is natural that whenever we hold a certain viewpoint, we hope that the viewpoint will be true, leading to us searching for arguments that supports our viewpoints. With so many news outlets, and research paper available at the click of a button as a result of the rise of the internet, we can find information that supports our views with relative ease. This effect is further compounded by the formation of public blogs, forums and chatrooms on the internet where people discuss such issues. As we are able to interact with like-minded individuals, our perspective becomes reinforced and more polarised.
- b. This effect is worsened by the personalised and algorithmic nature of the internet. Media on the internet provides us with an unprecedented amount of content. In order to help us navigate the information available on the internet, many platforms have some form of algorithm that helps recommend to users what the algorithm perceives the user will be interested in reading in order to increase their viewership and consequently, their revenue. Often times, we are more interested in reading what supports our ideology, rather than what criticises us. A 2021 study by the University of Oslo analysed data from Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit, and through the analysis of social issues like vaccinations and abortion, users are found to be more likely to receive information with a similar political standpoint as their own.
- c. Research by the Chinese University of Hong Kong has found strong relation between social media and polarised partisan politics, which provided an explanation as to how ex-president Donald Trump was able to garner over 70 Million votes, despite a COVID-19 response that slumped the country into untold recession and unemployment, together with over half a million deaths.

6. Activism

- a. Social media can provide movements with a platform to reach a much greater outreach and support than previously conceivable.
 - i. Especially true with celebrities, with ALS Ice Bucket challenge being performed by a wide range of celebrities from actors like Dwayne Johnson to technological innovator Bill Gates. Ended up raising more than \$135M and garnered huge amounts of support for it.
 - ii. Black lives matter able to garner support around the country and campaign those in power towards positive change through large-scale protests. In the end, Justice in Policing Act of 2020 was passed, promising greater equality for all and reduced police violence.
 - iii. Can help individuals: 2007 Pearson vs Chung case: Custom cleaners Chung family were sued over 67 Million by judge Roy Pearson for losing his pants at dry cleaning. Although they eventually won their lawsuit, they had to shut down their business due to the 2 year expensive court proceedings. In the end, media outrage helped them receive \$100,000 in fundraising

- b. Social media promotes ethical practices in the corporate world by putting people under its spotlight.
 - i. Social media offers a platform for people to speak regardless of their position, standing, ethos, and financial status. Furthermore, the anonymity provided by the internet allows people the freedom to voice out their feelings without the risk of backlash.
 - ii. Resulted in ethics and social image being important for organisations, as they fear retribution on social media as their unhealthy business practices are exposed, which could lead to large-scale bad publicity and boycotts. This has led organisations to having greater transparency and ethical business practices. Environmental groups like Greenpeace able to use social media to garner over 400 million views to generate bad publicity for the chocolate company Nestle, who used palm oil in its products, an unsustainable practice. By 2015, the company was forced to make attempts to change.
 - iii. NOC, overworking and toxic culture (calling employees at 3am, favouritism, badmouthing etc.)
 - iv. Can allow for 'David vs Goliath' battles between individuals and large corporations.
- c. Slacktivism
 - i. Slacktivism often revolves around the idea of a large number of people who show support for a cause, but without significant commitment or action taken on their part. For example, they could be donating small funds or signing petition, which can be seen as a small action that people can make to play their part.
 - ii. However, despite being able to help garner publicity and support, it is seldom able to convince people to provide genuine help, for example through volunteering or making a change. Much as it is easy for them to help, it is just as easy to disengage seconds later, giving the illusion they genuinely care about the issue although they may have simply forgotten about it. Furthermore, it could create a perverse incentive for people who believe they have already done their part.
 - iii. 2014 BringBackOurGirls campaign to save 200 Nigerian girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, which led to millions of posts using the hashtag and the illusion that something would be done. However, 1 year later no significant action was taken and nothing was achieved.
- d. Too performative – offering superficial support to cause without its followers having real understanding of the complex issue
 - i. TeamSeas – Mr Beast raising over 30 million dollars to remove 30 million pounds of trash from the seas with massive Youtube and social media campaign. However, at the end of the day it fails to address the root cause of the problem that developing countries with insufficient waste disposal systems have no alternative to dumping waste on mountainsides with return to the beach during rain.
- e. Activism could result in extreme and radical tactics to push for one's agenda, which could worsen the situation on the ground, creating greater chaos and unrest
 - i. BLM protests in 2020 escalated into extreme violence and shops being ransacked across the US, looting between May 28 and 6 June causing over a billion dollars in damages, becoming the highest recorded damage from civil disorder, resulting in over 700 law enforcement officers injured
 - ii. 2019-20 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill movement saw incidents of arson and vandalism of private and public property that ultimately had a 3% decrease in the HK GDP (according to HK

Census and Statistics department), particularly affecting small business owners.

7. Personal Data and Surveillance (Cross topic with technology)

8. Linkage

- a. Mass media able to join different elements of society not directly connected
- b. Linkages could have harmful consequences – Facebook had to remove nearly 3 million pieces of hate speech between July and September 2018, a 15% increase from the start of the year.
- c. Social media has transformed the Internet's great power into a weapon that has adverse effects on society
- d. BesaMafia website in 2016 had at least 40 cases of contract killings, with 200+ photos of their victims and thousands of messages between killers and instigators.

9. Telescoping phenomenon: Psychological manipulation of the media

- a. The media and news often focus on sentimental and visible issues, which results in the telescoping of our perspectives onto particular issues. Instead of explaining in detail long-term trends and the evolution of society, news and the media has begun acting like sports commentary, simply bringing our attention to the most 'catastrophic' and eye-catching news to grab our attention. As a result, the media paints a picture of the world that often does not reflect what reality is like.
- b. 2017 research from the University of Stanford has found that the media portrayal of Nuclear energy has been exceedingly negative due to the ease with which the media is able to highlight catastrophes like the Fukushima and Chernobyl disasters. With TV new segments like Chernobyl, movies like Mad Max, articles, books and documentaries focusing on these tragedies, public opinion of nuclear energy has become exceedingly in the favour that nuclear energy is dangerous and apocalyptic
- c. However, the reality is that nuclear energy is far from. Research and statistics from Statistica have found for every terawatt hour of energy produced, nuclear energy on average results in a mere 90 fatalities, exceedingly small when compared to 100,000 from coal and 36,000 from oil. By nature, nuclear energy is much safer and sustainable than these energy sources, and the role of the media in skewing public perception otherwise cannot be understated.
- d. This has led to public policy reflecting this: It is estimated that as a result of the strict regulation and checks required in nuclear energy in the EU, over 10 years are required to build a nuclear power plant – an unreasonable investment for most firms. Germany has shut down 11 of its 17 nuclear reactors as an attempt to appease the public, with the remaining scheduled to be shut down by 2022.
- e. As such, nuclear energy remains at a mere 2% of our consumption – far from a force that could help us bring sustainable energy into the norm to combat global issues like climate change and depleting supply chains, and has led to the unnecessary deaths of thousands.
- f. Another example would be the recent American withdrawal from Afghanistan – while the media and news outlets focused on the plights of the thousands of Afghan collaborators in Kabul, many neglected to consider the women's rights and millions of Afghans who live in severe poverty, an issue far more severe issue.

10. Business and media dependence

- a. Social media has become a key part of many businesses due to its large proliferation through the population. Social media offers businesses an affordable way to achieve high quality brand recognition for a low cost, as well as provide updates to its large fanbases. Furthermore, social media can bring fans together in fan-groups and pages, creating discussions and forums to

discuss products. Lastly, social media brings round-the-clock advertising and engagement to businesses,

- b. Especially true given globalisation and the connection of customer bases around the globe, rather than just concentrated in single locations.
- c. In fact, 97% of the fortune-500 enterprises uses some social media platform to promote its initiatives.
- d. Closer to home, the Wanton Noodle stall SOI-19 was at the brink of bankruptcy before customers managed to help them out through the use of social media, for example through popular media platforms like the 'Food King' show, hosted by Night Owl Cinematics and has hundreds of thousands of views for each video.

11. Fake News

- a. Rise of low barriers to entry for people to post information online has given people the power to spread any kind of news they like for almost no cost. Couple with the anonymity online, and the lack of accountability for what people post online has resulted in the rise of fake news.
- b. This is worsened by the large amounts of news that we see each day, as a result people often only view the most alarming, most interesting news.
- c. Brexit: Some have accused the leave camp of propagating false information about economic costs and benefits, hindering many from making a clear decision. Voters falsely believed that the UK gives 350 million pounds a week to the EU, and this money will be fully diverted into the NHS should Brexit happen, more than double the actual value. This information could have played a factor in the eventual decision at the referendum.
- d. 2016 US Presidential Race: According to research by the university of Ohio, of the Obama supporters who did not vote for Clinton, over 20% were found to believe that Hilary Clinton had approved weapon sales to Jihad Islamists, including ISIS and a strong correlation with believing fake news articles and voting against Hilary Clinton.
- e. Frivolous lawsuits: McDonalds Coffee Cup Lawsuit. Stella Liebeck spilled scalding coffee on herself and sued McDonalds for 2.7 million dollars
 - i. Many media outlets published short, misleading reports, giving false illusion that she had sued for almost no reason → Representative John Kasich had even spoken out for tort reform (legal)
 - ii. She only sued them to cover her medical bills – damages were 200K, and had requested their coverage at least 3 times