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One with the Media: An Analysis of Media Use

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Part I – Media Use and Me

With modern connected technology so ubiquitous anymore, it's nearly impossible for it to not play a major role in our everyday lives. I mean, even cars are being manufactured with social media and news apps built in. So for the most part, we typically are never more than an arm's reach away from the world around us. As for myself, I am a very connected person. From the time I wake up until I go to bed, I am typically exposing myself to some form of media. Right off the bat, one of the first things I do is use my smartphone to access weather information, which determines what I'm going to need to wear to combat the wind tunnel that is Kent. If it's a day I work, I usually double check my schedule on the company website to make sure I didn't miss any last minute changes. Right away without access to the internet, I would be pretty lost. Personal entertainment is also a big reason I use my phone as well, I've usually got something streaming through Google Play Music or Pandora during my car rides.

In my downtime I'm a big fan of losing myself on StumbleUpon, a website that directs you to random websites based on your current topic of interest or learned interests. This is actually where I discover a lot of viral videos, and information on a variety of different subjects. Without a doubt though I feel like I'm with most people by saying my phone is the single most important piece of media technology I use. Communications plays an important part of my phones importance, but its speedy 4G connection helps me throughout the day with getting updates on certain events and even just for on the fly research on a product at the store (can I get it cheaper on amazon, does this go with what I'm cooking, etc.).

When I'm not occupied with work or school, I'm still seeking some sort of constant media stimulation. So I typically play a game for an hour or two in my off time, or throw something on Netflix before I go to bed. Interestingly, I actually found an article detailing why

people, such as myself, crave information overload. What it amounts to is that we're basically addicted to dopamine. It's a neurotransmitter in the brain that recent research has shown dictates or levels of arousal and goal-directed behaviors. Dopamine makes us curious about ideas and abstract concepts, and then the opioid system rewards us with pleasure (Weinschenk, 2012). So what's essentially happening is that we receive stimulation from taking in information and our brain rewards us for it. Because we are exposed to so much information, Google, Twitter, YouTube, etc. We are constantly being rewarded for performing an incredibly easy task which in turn makes us want more and more, fueling our dependence on media devices (Weinschenk, 2012). It really helps to make sense of our individual dependence regarding media and it's made me take a retracted perspective of my own media usage.

Part II – Ownership and Economics of the Media

The number of companies who actually control significant portions of the media is alarmingly small. It is in essence, an oligopoly in every aspect. What is rather frightening is that as the number goes down, the overall control the remaining companies have over media increases. Already we are exposed to instances of these corporations censoring certain forms of media, or dictating what is aired. In class we learned about Clear Channel blacklisting a large number of songs post 9/11 they thought may make people uncomfortable or offended, and that's just a small example.

What I am growing far more concerned about however, as 2015 grows closer and closer, is the subject of net neutrality. Net neutrality is the idea that the internet should be free and equal for all. Which is exactly what telecommunication companies have been spending millions to

ensure changes. When the FCC renders their verdict, set to be sometime early in 2015, there is a possibility that the way we access media will change for the worst. Currently as it exists, when we want access to information on the internet, streaming of music and movies, or data connectivity through apps on our phone, we get what we want relatively quickly (assuming a good internet connection). What telecommunications companies are lobbying to do is to have the FCC change the laws regarding how ISPs provide internet. Telecom giants believe that they should be able to charge more for services such as Netflix that use large amounts of data (BB News, 2014).

Charging more for data heavy sites isn't all they would be able to do though. They would be able to create fast lanes and slow lanes for internet traffic based on their preferences. If you want people to access your website faster, pay X amount. This is effectively holding websites that rely on the internet to make money for ransom. We already saw a scary glimpse into the future when back in late 2013, early 2014, Comcast drastically cut Netflix bandwidth for their customers for several months after arguments that Netflix should pay more to ISPs to deliver content to their subscribers. Comcast and a few others such as Verizon, who they also reached a deal with, effectively bullied Netflix into giving in to their demands and paying up (Luckerson, V. 2014).

Something that's likely to happen also if the FCC backs Telecom companies is making the internet go the route of premium cable channels. Just like you have to pay extra for HBO or Showtime, companies like Comcast want to be able to charge users extra to visit certain websites, which means that some of our favorite sites could disappear from public access and require a premium service to access. Compliment that with greatly reduced browsing speeds for websites not on Comcast and other company's good side and the internet becomes a broken

fragment of its former self. Losing net neutrality would be a tragedy for us all. Telecom companies stand to gain an incredible amount of money if the FCC sides with them, but we as Americans will lose the freedom we enjoy online that sets us apart from heavily regulated countries like China.

Part III – Regulating Media

We have reached a point in time where the number of sources for media is through the roof and people have access to countless forms. The vast majority of these sources are unregulated, as the FCC only encompasses broadcast such as TV and Radio. The internet, is the wild wild west of media sources. Anything goes and no one is going to stop it. My argument though, is isn't that what makes the internet wonderful? People sometimes suggest that there should be more government regulation of popular news new media sources, but to what ends? Regulating the internet would undermine exactly what the internet stands for. I don't think it should be placed on consumers or watch dog groups like the FCC to monitor and enforce the internet, but placed back on the owners of the specific websites on the internet. Why personal belief is that if you find a website that offends you, don't access it, simple as that. Restricting content also restricts the creativity and free expression of the content creators. If a website decides to use vulgar or sexually explicit references I feel it should be allowed to do so. If a respected company, like WebMD, for example wanted to start publishing explicit, it should be allowed. However, it never would, as its credibility as a trusted source would plummet. Patrons of websites like these expect the content to be clean, because that is what they have come to expect from the website. In another example, I'll look at the Oatmeal, a website whose author draws and narrates comics surrounding everything from politics to cats for comedic purposes. He uses a great deal of profanity in his comics to illustrate his point and for the sake of humor, but that's

what fans have learned to expect and love about his work. Regulating the internet could potentially jeopardize websites such as these that have been built around the free expression of the internet, and the livelihood of the websites owners who rely on the websites for profit.

TV and Radio are two mediums some argue should still be regulated more. Throughout the recent decades, anyone who has consumed media on the TV could attest to the fact that broadcasting regulations have become more lax in some cases. I believe this follows the rapidly changing generation of people accessing TV stations. Twenty years ago, it would have been shocking to see someones nude butt on television, or for profane and graphic language to be used on shows like the breaking bad and the walking dead. Times are changing though, and so are our expectations of media regulation. The United States isn't even at the forefront of lax censorship as Great Britains censorship laws are even less regulating. The goal of regulating broadcast content is to protect children from material we fear would damage their minds. So we limit TV and what can be said on radio and call it a day. In an age though where children are the most connected age group, are we that naïve to think that they are not already exposed to explicit content in their everyday lives. Between conversing with their friends or browsing online children are exposed to the very same content we are trying to keep from them. When that hot new rap song drops on the radio, I can guarantee most kids are going to be downloading the explicit version online unbeknownst to their parents, because they like it "better".

Part IV – This Class and My Future

Throughout the last several weeks, I've learned a lot about the way communications work in mass. I'd like to own a few different companies in the future, and I've been in the process of starting an online business with a friend. A lot of what I've learned throughout the semester I've used to help target how I will communicate certain messages and I've saved a few of the

PowerPoints for reference in the future. I've already looked at way I can use different forms of the advertisement we learned about to market my services. Product and service ads obviously come to mind when promoting a concept, but I found potential in goodwill ads as well. You have the opportunity to communicate a helpful message supported by your company. This in turn causes customers to look more favorably at your business, but also reinforces in their heads that your company is an expert in the industry and can be trusted. This equates to increased revenue in the future. I also was able to take aspects of selective exposure and apply it to sales approaches. After making a decision, people don't want to be exposed to elements that would cause them to unsure about their previous decision and will attempt to avoid those situations at all costs. Similarly in a sales environment, if I can eliminate the potential for customers to feel uneasy about a decision for any reason, I can enjoy a greater success as a company.

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