



Politics of media and contemporary capitalism

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the major postulates of McLuhan's theoretical leap and some of the responses to from other scholars against the new developments in media of the present world. It is obvious that there are, from a cultural point of view, multiple ways to communicate, share information and send messages. Speeches, texts and images are essentially constituted by different mediums and they inherently provide with different messages. The medium is wherein the structural limits or constraints of the message of media are hidden. In other words, the medium and its own messages are the hidden unconscious of the media. The ability to accommodate radical messages varies radically from media to media, based on its oppressive nature of the medium. The advantages of a new technology or a new media is solely based the emancipator potentials of its medium.

Keywords: media, McLuhan, Neil Postman, dallasification

Introduction

Elucidating the aphorism, 'the medium is the message', Marshall McLuhan asserts that the content of the media is inherently shaped by the medium. It means that different media necessarily gives you different messages. The media has changed a lot in its journey from print medium to internet medium via television medium. One could argue that the print media was essentially much more critical than television as its content was less restrained by the print space than the television-space. The medium is the message as a metaphor is important in understanding the new electronic media as well. One could well argue that the medium is the unconscious of the media. Every medium is encrypted with its own messages which in turn substantially influence the message or the content. It is through analyzing the shift from traditional media to the new electronic media; McLuhan understood the nuances of medium as the message. The purpose of this paper is to examine the major postulates of McLuhan's theoretical leap and some of the responses to from other scholars against the new developments in media of the present world.

McLuhan's conception of medium

Although, the sentence 'medium is the message' is apparently very simple; it has many complex connotations. At first, it is just equating the medium with the message. Secondly but most importantly, if medium is the message, all other messages become secondary or non-messages. Therefore, it stipulates that the medium is the primary message and whatever message is in scripted on it is not substantial or exist only in permanent reference to the message of the medium. McLuhan does not negate the existence of the message of the content; therefore, he asserts that "although the medium is the message, the controls go beyond the programming. The restraints are always directed to the 'content', which is always another medium" (305). It means that the message of the medium is primary and the message of the content withstand

only with reference to the message. It is important to remember that every medium is the extension of human capabilities and different mediums alters different human capabilities in different ways.

Medium is what is form in literature; it is not just capturing the content but reproduces it in many ways. As we cannot understand an art work without deconstructing the form, the message of a media can only be understood when we deconstruct the politics of its medium. It is widely observed that the communication revolution in the technological sphere has not yet turned out to be a communication revolution in the real world. Although, there exist actual potentials for disseminating information which is crucial to enhance democracy among the broad masses, the internet media world has not advanced much in this line. Not only the media has failed in deepening democracy in general but also is unable to substantiate democracy within itself. It is because of the fact that as a medium the new information communication technologies are necessarily fragmented and not amenable to deep contemplation.

By and large, global media is controlled the big corporations which are even more wealthy than a number of countries in the Global South. The much celebrated 'marketplace of ideas' is no more considered as free as it appears. It is not just because of the fact that American media conglomerates have more corporate and monitory power. On the other hand, the new media technologies as medium are highly amenable to corporatization and monopolization. Therefore, we never have a media world without monopolies; one monopoly will always be replaces with another. The emergence of terms such as public service broadcasting, alternative media, citizen's journalism, and independent media centers and so on denotes both the phenomenal corporatization of media and the ongoing global resistance to it. However, such so called media alternatives too are not able to overcome the oppressive content of the medium.

In the contemporary capitalist stage of total subsumption, media democracy is something which is characterized by its deficit. In the liberal thought media has always been portrayed as a counter weight to the state which is a 'necessary evil'. For Habermass, media itself constitute the public sphere in a liberal democracy. Nevertheless, it is becoming evident that mere freedom of press does not immediately bring more democracy as largely exemplified in the state of media affairs in twenty first century. In practice, media is less accountable to the general public than the state. Media too has its own private interest for being less transparent since it also works under the market logic of profit. Media's ability to strengthen democracy is directly proportional to the amount of internal democracy available in the media sphere. There, of course, will be more internal democracy in a print house than a television house.

Media and the (UN) making of people's identities

Human life in twenty first century is profoundly influenced by the new the technologies of information and communication as the global economy is increasingly being dominated by post-industrial knowledge based exchanges. Moreover, the invention of the social networking softwares is also deeply changing human social interactions as well. Internet and advanced telecommunication technologies play a commendable role in the making and unmaking of people's lives and the way new communities emerge and consolidate themselves. It is important to note that the vitality of information and communication technologies is not limited to the economic sphere (although they have profound economic capabilities); on the other hand, technology has become vital in (re)articulating culture, values, attitudes and lifestyles.

The multiplication and fragmentation of life itself is a product of the new media which are fragmentary and multiple by definition. Hall is of the view that "the emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, new communities, hitherto excluded from the major forms cultural representation, unable to locate themselves except as de-centred or subaltern", as result of the discovered space in the globalized world and its postmodern time-space, "have acquired through struggle, sometimes in very marginalized ways, the means to speak for themselves for the first time" (34). In the new medium of internet, the mainstream is not he core, but it exist as the collective of the margins. The new media spaces are therefore being opened up for the new social spaces.

The US media and dallasification

Commenting on the Americanization of media, Chalaby has argued that "all the available evidence points to an expansion of the gap between US media giants and regional outlets based in Europe and elsewhere" (38). The structural adjustment plan and other neoliberal policies followed by a number of governments in the developing countries are instrumental in initiating this shift in the media sector. For instance, it has been observed that "the Dallasification of television content" is leading to the colonization of European media space by the American media conglomerates. According to De Bens and de Smaele, the term 'Dallasification' refers at the increasingly "non-stop homogenizing inflow of American programmes and

obviously not to the Americanizing effect of this content on the attitudes and world perceptions of the viewers" (52). It is the power of the medium of internet to television to homogenize is providing us with homogenized content all over the world.

It is even true with new mediums such as video games. It is homogenizing the life experiences of children from all over the world by completely alienating them from both human world and the nature. It is not for nothing that the so-called real sports are being increasingly outdated, especially among the children and students. The medium of video games is nothing but virtual; therefore, the message it delivers on children is that of virtual reality so that they will be restored to virtual realities. Moreover, the medium of video games necessitates virtual socialization. Therefore, the active players of video games are socialized through and onto virtual realities. Hello agues that "the player is always active participant [in video games] who constructs the game at the same time whereas in stories the setting is preset and the role can be seen more passive" (4). The virtual possibilities in the virtual world are immense as the medium of videogame and computer technology is not finite as television or print media. Therefore, the users of new media always seek the infinite possibilities of the virtual world than facing the constraints of the real life.

The politics of the medium

In his seminal work "Amusing Ourselves to Death", Neil Postman's famously argues that the "medium as the metaphor" logic inherent in the television actively subverts the reflective roles of media on public discourse. The politics of the medium of the television is by definition apolitical and television as a medium of communication is less capable of producing contemplative thought as compared to the traditional print media. Postman's metaphor of television as a medium could well be extended into thorough analysis of the new age media as well in order to understand its politics as a medium.

Of course, there is no doubt that the politics of medium deeply influences the way the media functions and the message it (de)communicates. For instance, the twenty first century developments in the information and communication technologies have give birth to what is known as online communities or virtual communities. It would have been impossible to imagine such a development through the medium of either print media or television. At first, the politics of medium was materialized through the advancement from typography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the development of television technologies in the twentieth century. The addictive characteristics of the medium of television had helped itself to colonize much of the mediascape by the last decades of twentieth century, mainly though soap operas and other popular programs.

Therefore, Postman asserts that 'if the delivery is not the same, then the message, quite likely, is not the same. And if the context in which the message is experienced is altogether different from what it was in Jesus' time, we may assume that its social and psychological meaning is different, as well" (118). The aphorism that the medium is the metaphor is a revised improvement of Marshal McLuhan's idea of 'the

medium is the message'. Typography in its linear logic was fully compatible with reason, logic and rationality but, on the other hand, television is not only irrational but also it actively reproduces and disseminates irrationality. Postman nostalgically remembers that the "American public discourse, being rooted in the bias of the printed word, was serious, inclined toward rational argument and presentation, and, therefore, made up of meaningful content" (52). On the other hand, television subverts its own secondary message, which is the actual content because the primary message is entertainment. Certainly, television is a medium which is encrypted with the inscribed by the message of entertainment. Television degenerates the citizens as mere consumers and bereaves them from their rights as its medium is a form of oppression. The medium of television does not involve any possibility for rational communication. Even the content such as news is essentially formulated as a form of entertainment. It means that we have nothing to be inevitably optimistic about the new developments in media technologies or in the mediums of communication and information sharing. This is the underlying theoretical conviction guides an analysis of mediums of media along the lines of Postman's theoretical postulate.

Conclusion

It is obvious that there are, from a cultural point of view, multiple ways to communicate, share information and send messages. Speeches, texts and images are essentially constituted by different mediums and they inherently provide with different messages. The medium is wherein the structural limits or constraints of the message of media are hidden. In other words, the medium and its own messages are the hidden unconscious of the media. The ability to accommodate radical messages varies radically from media to media, based on its oppressive nature of the medium. The advantages of a new technology or a new media is solely based the emancipatory potentials of its medium

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