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Research Article

Effects of Mass Media on Culture, Individual Society and Educational Perspectives

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Abstract

Mass media have become the principal infrastructure for sense-making in contemporary life. From newspapers and television to streaming platforms and algorithmically curated social feeds, media systems shape the stories people encounter, the identities they adopt, and the collective projects they pursue. In this paper, I review both classical and modern scholarship to examine the individual, societal, and cultural consequences of mass media, particularly regarding its educational implications. It articulates the historical development of mass media, discusses the agenda-setting, framing, cultivation, uses and gratifications, social learning, spiral of silence, encoding or decoding, public sphere, and the "network society" theories, and assesses the culture impacts (homogenization vs. hybridization of culture, representation and identity, cultural language, and social norms), the individual (attention and cognitive processes, attitudes and behaviors, general well-being, parasocial relationships), and society (the public sphere, political communication, social polarization and misinformation, the creative economy, and social inequality). The appropriately titled "translating theory to practice" pedagogy section, focused on media and information literacy, critical digital pedagogy, and production-based practices, attempts to balance the insights of the preceding sections, around educational practices and risks and ethical issues such as privacy, platform dependence, and dependence on content moderation. The paper ends with well-considered limitations and actionable steps for educators, policymakers, and platforms. The core assertion across these various domains is that while media effects and consequences are significant, they are also conditional; the outcomes depend on audience agency, social context, institutional incentives, and the technical architectures through which contemporary media flow.

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INTRODUCTION

Mass media are the connective tissue of modern social life. They distribute information at scale, anchor shared rituals (e.g., national broadcasts, sporting events), and make distant communities intelligible to one another. Historically, the term mass media has referred to ontologically one-to-many frameworks—press, radio, film, and television—targeting large segments of the population. In the last few decades, digital networks have fused the divides between mass, interpersonal, and participatory communication. Networks now facilitate what Castells calls "mass self-communication," whereby individuals self-publish to large audiences, and algorithms curate those audiences (Castells, 2010).

The media has been the subject of powerful discourse for over a hundred years. Positive impacts of the media include informing citizens, fostering empathy, and facilitating social movements, while negative impacts include stereotyping, misinformation, distraction, and inequality. These contradictory impacts are also not uniform. They are shaped by media form and genre, the users' motivations and literacy skills, and the socio-economic and political contexts surrounding the creation and consumption of the media. The culture, cognition and behaviour of individuals and social institutions are shaped in consequential, yet contingent ways by the mass media.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

Print and Broadcast Era

The printing press revolutionised the methods of communication, enabling the exchange of ideas and the articulation of public discourse. This occurred during the proto-public sphere as described by Habermas (1989) and characterised by the availability of rational communication in print. Critical exchanges moved beyond the intimate circle of letters, and the use of printed material and communication became interlaced with the public sphere through pamphlets and newspapers. The identity of readers and the communities they inhabited became interlaced with newspapers, and the communities became, in Anderson's (1983) phrase, "imagined communities." That said, the print culture paved the way for knowledge and information proliferation. The consequences of unregulated communication were described by Lippmann (1922) with the words, "mass communication… manipulating the public mind and disseminating propaganda." Communication printed and in newspapers was wholly unregulated, and propaganda could be easily disseminated and circulated.

As radio and television became prevalent, communication took the form of powerful one-to-many systems. Subsequently, entire nations became reachable communication-wise. Broadcast media integrated people around the nation and facilitated culture and unity formation through the experiences, events, and programs. However, worries began to emerge regarding the monopoly of information and control and the effects it would have on public perception (Bourdieu, 1998). Audiences were assumed to be passive, and the "hypodermic needle" model, which stated people were easily influenced by what they heard and saw, dominated early studies. Later studies argued for the varying interpretations of media messages in relation to audience personal contexts and the experiences they had. The advent of cable and digital media was highly transformative in audience diversion and participatory asymmetry. Today, digital platforms stand (Gillespie, 2018). However, three principles persist as in the past: shaped agendas are presented by media, audiences are active meaning makers, and the information, which is politically and economically charged, is regulated and controlled.

Cable, convergence, and platforms

The introduction of cable television was the first major shift in media history, and also the first major segmentation of consumers and audiences in media. Previously, in the broadcasting age, few channels captured the entire public attention, but cable brought in a range of content and increased viewer choice. This shift, however, did diminish the sense of shared experience of a nation that mass and public broadcasting created. The next and most important shift, fragmenting media and content, was the internet. The main feature of the internet was its ability to erase the traditional lines between media consumers and producers, allowing users the ability to create, share, and edit content instantly in a more interactive form of communication. As Jenkins (2006) stated, "convergence culture" was the time when narratives, information, and brands could flow through various channels, and consumers became active participants.

The contemporary informational environment is dominated by search engines, social networks, and streaming services. These services function within digital ecosystems through algorithmic gatekeeping, whereby automated processes determine which content is presented to users and in what order (Gillespie, 2018).

Theoretical Lenses for Understanding Media Effects

Understanding how media influences people and society require several theoretical perspectives. Closely related to this is framing theory, which concerns how information is delivered. The choice of language, the tone employed, and the context provided influence audience understanding. For example, describing a crime as a moral failure suggests punitive action, while describing a crime as a social problem suggests social action and reform (Entman, 1993). According to cultivation theory, people's perceptions of reality can be shaped by the media, especially when the exposure is consistent and persistent. For instance, people may perceive the world as more violent than it actually is due to exposure to violent television (Gerbner et al, 2002; Morgan and Shanahan, 2010). Conversely, the uses and gratifications theory argues that audience members are more than passive recipients by actively seeking out media and fulfilling their information needs, learning what is entertaining, identifying, and socialising (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974).

Explanations for behaviour learned from media may integrate social learning theory, which indicates observation prompted

modeled behavior reception. Positive influences, such as healthy habits acquired, and negative influences, such as violent behaviour adoption, become explainable through the same theory to an extent (Bandura, 1977). The spiral of silence theory describes people choosing to remain silent and not voice an unpopular opinion because of a potential social impact. Silence, as a result, creates a false impression of uniform agreement and absence of contention (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

The encoding/decoding model focuses on the assumption of media communicators embedding preferred meanings to messages, which are then interpreted by receivers outside the creator's intended meanings and context. Media representation is therefore non-neutral, as it exerts, and continues to exert, social and structural power through inclusion and exclusion of people and issues (Hall, 1980; 1997). The public sphere theory contains a perspective of media as a realm of discourse and democracy, which is subject to erosion, as the rationality of debate is undermined by entertainment and commercial values (Habermas, 1989).

The final area acknowledges how globalisation and cultural flow theory's view media transgressing boundaries and producing channels for cultural interaction and, simultaneously, concerns over cultural hegemony by stronger nations (Schiller, 1976; Appadurai, 1990; Robertson, 1995). In the digital environment, the network society and filter-bubble theories explain how algorithms tailor information to individual users, impacting what they view and potentially limiting their perspectives (Castells, 2010; Pariser, 2011). Absent these perspectives, one could easily oversimplify and underestimate the complexities surrounding how any media impacts its users.

CULTURAL EFFECTS: Stories, Symbols, And Social Meaning

Homogenization vs. Hybridisation

The global spread of mass media has allowed large media corporations to shape what people around the world watch, listen to, and read. There is the risk of experiencing cultural sameness, where the same television shows, movies, and music become universal. For instance, Hollywood movies and Western pop music are pioneers of what is now termed 'global entertainment' and cultural homogenization—a process that entails the disappearance of local traditions and art forms (Schiller, 1976). Yet, the media do not simply overtake and eliminate local cultures. The global and local are combined when people adapt and remix global media, traditions, or values. This process is referred to as hybridisation. K-pop, for instance, is considered a Western and Korean pop hybrid. There are also regional adaptations of telenovelas, where local customs and languages are incorporated (Appadurai, 1990; Robertson, 1995). The instances of K-pop and regional telenovelas illustrate that culture is negotiated and re-shaped, which is a testament to the lack of fixity or a singular dimension. Media do promote a more expansive range of cultural symbols, but that promotion is accompanied by a more focused or monopolised control of the symbols, as to the voices and images that gain prominence on a global scale.

Representation, Identity, and Recognition

The representation of people and groups in the media is far more than a mere depiction of a slice of reality—it becomes a frame through which people construct a self- and other-knowledge. Members of some groups may be continuously and repetitively invoked through stereotypes, prejudiced representations, or, even worse, completely erased. Such exclusion closes the set of alternative personae and identities an individual might draw from. Such disqualification may result in the loss of an individual's voice in the social sphere, and, at the same time, degrade their self-esteem and sense of social belonging. In contrast, positive self-representation in the media, as in the cases of more inclusive casting, queer-centered narratives, and social visibility of people with disabilities, uplifts the self-esteem and social cohesion of a community. Such positive representation constitutes progress. Changes of this order, in the social realm, usually result from a conjunction of activism and a responsive industry looking forward to meeting the needs and desires of a diverse audience. Even within the framework of cultural studies and audience-centred research more generally, the exercise of self-qualification and self-affirmation of individuals and groups may be overridden. Decision-making on the constructions of reality to be represented, and on the marketing and distribution of those constructions, remains with executives and other media gatekeepers. The struggle for equitable representation in media remains an unaddressed cultural and political struggle.

Memory, Myth, and Narrative

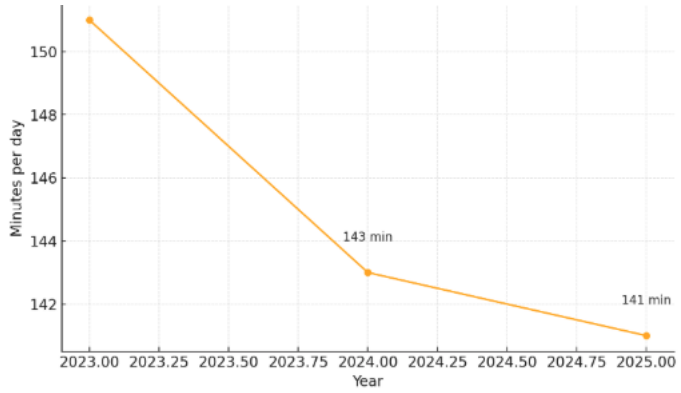
The way in which societies remember their history and how they interpret it is shaped by the media. Films and documentaries, as well as media coverage of anniversaries and biographical accounts, help to shape what people remember and what narratives they share about certain events and people. In the process, they reconstruct history in a simplified way and create powerful myths, which are essential in the construction of a collective identity (Anderson, 1983). To illustrate, the historical films and national holidays of a country may help unify people, but they may also promote a certain type of nationalism or a corporate agenda. In this regard, independent and alternative media tend to provide counter-narratives focusing on the dominant story, which they tend to phrase differently as 'more critical' or 'more inclusive' From this, it can be seen that memory, when shaped by media, is far from neutral, as it is a product of a complex interplay between power, ideology, and truth.

INDIVIDUAL EFFECTS: Cognition, Emotion, Behaviour

Attention and Cognitive Habits

Media environments train attentional rhythms. The continual partial attention of feed-based interfaces, constant notifications, and autoplay can fragment focus. While human agency remains, design patterns exploit predictable cognitive biases (e.g., novelty preference). Educationally, this underscores the value of metacognitive strategies and "attention hygiene," not blanket moral panics.

Figure 3: Average Daily Time Spent Using Social Media



The image illustrates the different social and video platforms available to people around the world to get news, and how often they use those platforms. Based on the data, Facebook and YouTube are the most widely used platforms for getting updates, but Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X (Twitter) are used to a lesser extent. This pattern indicates a significant shift in audience behaviour, primarily the movement from traditional print and broadcasting media to digitised and interactive online news.

The shift in audience behaviour and the increased reliance on digital platforms for news suggest the importance of digital algorithms in shaping what users see and how they form their opinions. These algorithms operate in a dynamic environment, framing personalised news content in a value-laden manner. Thus, individuals' information consumption is increasingly dictated by algorithms and less by traditional media editors. This change constitutes the hybrid media system that communication scholars are referring to. In this scenario, social media platforms and traditional news media are interdependent; traditional media needs social media to expand audience reach, and social media needs traditional media for audience engagement.

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Persuasion

Through agenda-setting and framing, media shape not only what people think about but also the interpretation and evaluation of given issues. Repeated exposure to certain texts and messages increases the familiarity of those texts and messages, leading the individual to perceive those texts and messages as more truthful. This phenomenon is called the 'illusory truth effect.' This effect, together with motivated reasoning, where people accept information aligned with their pre-existing beliefs but reject information that runs contrary to those beliefs, strengthens the hold of certain texts and messages. The 'uses and gratifications' perspective also states that people engage with media in ways that vary according to their specific patterns or needs. For instance, some people seek information and surveillance through the news, others use media to express their identity through social media influencers, and many people consume media for social companionship in the form of parasocial relationships. This shows that media effects are not uniform but rather vary according to the individual's goals, the situation, and their emotional investment in the content.

Behaviour and Social Learning

The media profoundly influences behaviours by depicting and modelling social norms. Aligned with social learning theory, particularly Bandura (1977), individuals learn behaviours by observing others, especially when those behaviours receive social validation. Positive influences include public health campaigns and prosocial television programming that promote social cooperation and environmental philanthropy. Conversely, some media facilitate imitation of negative behaviours, such as violence, substance abuse, and other risky behaviours, particularly by children and adolescents. Imagination of such behaviours is compounded by a lack of alternative role models and weak critical thinking. Hence, media and critical thinking materials can have positive educational and motivational outcomes, provided they are developed and understood in light of their capacity to shape behaviour, be it for better or worse.

Parasocial Relationships

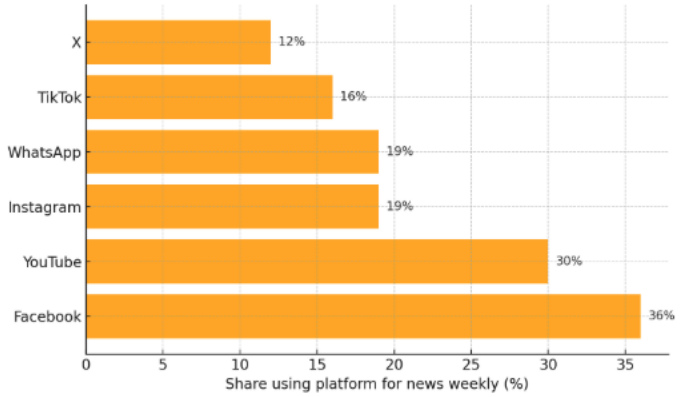
Audiences often form parasocial relationships—one-sided emotional bonds—with media figures such as television hosts, YouTubers, or streamers. These relationships can create feelings of closeness, comfort, and mentorship even though the interaction is not reciprocal. Such connections can positively influence learning and motivation, especially in educational contexts where communicators make complex topics accessible and engaging. However, they also carry emotional risks: when a media figure faces controversy, withdrawal, or loss, audiences may experience disappointment or grief. Parasocial connections, therefore reveal how deeply media personalities shape emotional and social life. When guided by critical awareness, these relationships can enhance learning and empathy rather than dependency or idealisation.

SOCIETAL EFFECTS: INSTITUTIONS, DEMOCRACY, AND INEQUALITY

The Public Sphere: From Mass to Hybrid Media Systems

According to Habermas, mass media constructs common points of reference as essential facilitators of deliberative processes (1989). However, factors stemming from commercialisation tend to promote spectacle; news values, particularly the conflict, personalisation, and novelty, are capable of distorting an individual's attention. Within the hybrid media system, legacy media and platforms are fused: the journalists chasing platform trends while platforms subsidise journalistic content. This can enhance participation (bottom-up agenda setting) as well as overshadow the truth with virality.

Figure 1: Share of online news consumers using each platform weekly



The chart depicts global digital inequalities. People from high-income countries have near-fully uninterrupted access to the internet, while individuals from low-income and least-developed countries have their access interrupted almost completely. This is not a mere difference in technology—it is a difference in people's opportunities to learn, to interact, and to participate in a digital economy. Negative access opportunities translate to poor access to education and employment, participation in the media, and culture, and they correlate with growing gaps in development between poor and rich countries. As Livingstone (2004) notes, the unconnected remain blocked from acquiring essential media literacy for citizenship. The ITU (2024) reiterates that these gaps hinder the attainment of global equity, and the gaps and unconnected lines affect sustainable development. The closure of such divides will allow full integration of all people into digital economies and societies, regardless of their location or wealth. The closure of such gaps is vital to social justice and educational equity in a digital world (Livingstone, 2004; ITU, 2024).

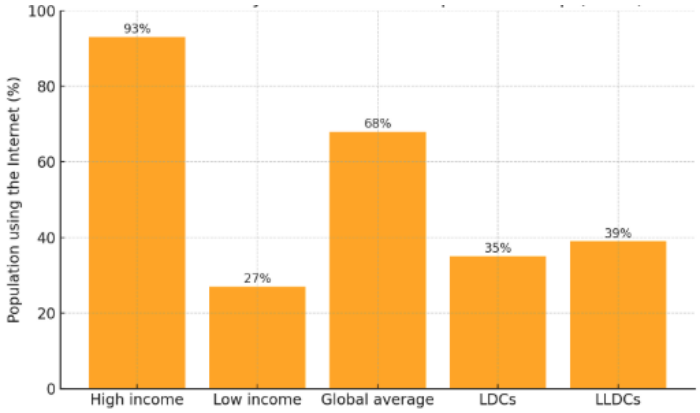
Political Communication, Polarisation, and Misinformation

As highlighted by Tufekci (2017, media facilitates social movements and civic campaigns by lessening coordination costs, which allows for better and faster mobilisations. On the other hand, fragmented information environments and algorithmic personalisation filter the information space, leading to echo chambers and filter bubbles (Sunstein, 2001; Pariser, 2011. The speed, emotional triggers, and attentional economy are exploited by the misinformation ecosystem, Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017. The impacts are uneven; some users have cross-cutting exposure while other users are completely siloed. Most importantly, while the geography, institutions, and identity are the sources of the polarisation, the media logics are loopholes that can worsen the polarisation.

Inequality and the Digital Divide

Gaps in access, skills, and uses produce stratified media benefits (Livingstone, 2004). Infrastructure disparities limit participation; literacy gaps affect susceptibility to misinformation; data extraction and targeted advertising differentially impact marginalised communities. Equity-oriented policy and pedagogy are therefore central to any media effects agenda.

Figure 2: Share of the population using the internet



The data suggests that, unlike 2023, global average social media screen time per user per day decreased marginally to 2025, and fell slightly below the 2-hour mark. These patterns might indicate that there exists some level of awareness regarding digital wellness and attention, especially concerning excessive digital screen time. Framed within this context, the very constant or small decrease of social media attention ratio suggests, in the very, very least, that social media pervades people's everyday life, influencing their behaviour, emotions and the very manner in which they learn.

The Educational Perspective: From Media in Education to Education About Media

Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

MIL frames students as inquirers who access, analyse, evaluate, create, and act using media. UNESCO's curriculum provides a global scaffold emphasising rights (freedom of expression, privacy), responsibilities, and competencies across print, broadcast, and digital environments (UNESCO, 2011). NAMLE and related organisations stress inquiry, reflection, and student voice. Research finds that literacy is not simply technical (how to use tools) but critical (how to question tools and messages) (Buckingham, 2003; Hobbs, 2010).

Integrating media and information literacy into any curriculum requires learners to understand and appreciate a number of concepts and skills. In the first instance, students need to be proficient in source evaluation and source verification. This requires multifaceted fact-checking, distinguishing between information that is news, opinion, advertisement, or entertainment, and the understanding of the economics of media and how media economics exercise a vice-like control over audience attention. In the second place, students need to learn how to analyse the framing and the representation of various issues. For instance, they need to analyse how the use of particular camera angles, editing, and specific languages in a given video or a film constructs meanings and the manner in which certain groups or issues are either included or excluded.

Combined with other skills, these competencies equip individuals with the ability to go beyond passive consumption and assess the materials they are presented with more thoroughly and engage in and contribute responsibly to the current media ecology. Acquisition of these skills enables individuals to become active, self-assertive citizens capable of interrogating, monitoring, and self-expression.

Pedagogical Approaches

Pedagogical strategies for exercises in media and information literacy take as one of their aims the active construction of knowledge rather than passive consumption of media. One of the more effective methods is using inquiry-based analysis, where learners try to make sense of a news story or a viral video through questions such as the following: What is the story about? What are the causes and the solutions? Who is present and who is absent? This fosters critical analysis of the content and an appreciation of media bias. In comparative framing analysis, learners are presented with the same news event in different media: a news account, an opinion article, and a news teletype. The goal is to demonstrate how framing changes an audience's understanding (Entman, 1993).

In counter-stereotype storytelling, learners are invited to challenge themselves to identify stereotypes in their favourite programs and construct short counter representations, using Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model. Some basic yet critical fact-checking drills in the form of verification involving reverse image searches, lateral reading, and claim-by-claim assessment of misinformation, and reflective journaling (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) are necessary exercises in the analysis of misinformation. Algorithm diaries engage students with understanding self-tracking; they record changes in suggestions given to them for a week and discuss how their user behaviour influences content visibility.

Ethics and Policy: Balancing Rights, Harms, and Infrastructures

Democracy hinges on the freedom to articulate, obtain, communicate, and encounter various perspectives. Although this freedom is foundational, it is not absolute. It requires moderation, especially concerning the prohibition of incitement, harassment, and the dissemination of dangerous ideas and materials. The challenge of moderation is compounded by the social media platforms run by private corporations, which tend to operate in policy, silo, and algorithmic opacity (Gillespie, 2018). They must be open and accountable to the social public of the social contract, which, in turn, gives them the right to control and understand the dissemination and value of information through algorithmic audits and the access of vetted researchers, public-interest data intermediaries, and public-interest data actuators. The absence of such audits and the control of information dissemination and processing algorithms—the so-called "black box" systems—stifle academic inquiry and erode public confidence.

In this particular context, children and other vulnerable users require additional protection. Autoplay/following streams, and other interactive and tailored advertisements offer predatory marketing opportunities. Likely, risks associated with autoplay videos and infinite scroll features can be mitigated through age-appropriate design codes and bolstered support from teachers and parents. Furthermore, the continued flow of certain types of media, for example, investigative journalism, local news, and local public media, is essential for the promotion of democratic values. Such media promote the development of citizens able and willing to participate in public life and civic activities (Putnam, 2000; Habermas, 1989).

Limitations and Countervailing Perspectives

Engaging media and underlying beliefs often engender the causation versus selection problem: People often gravitate toward media that align closely with their values, preferences, and interests, making it a challenge for scholars to determine the role of media in the formation or sustenance of certain attitudes. Outside experimental settings, the determination of causation and effects is difficult. Equally problematic is the ever-present diversity of effects. There is no media message whose effects are universal or equivalent. The same content has the potential to either educate or alienate a certain viewer. Age, level of education, culture, media literacy, and the prevailing social context are some of the key aspects that account for differences in media engagement. More recently, in the context of long-term research, the rapid development of media platforms has become a growing complication.

Media platforms that change in their interfaces, algorithms, and user behavioural patterns such that all conclusions that were tenable a couple of years ago are no longer valid. Hence, broader theoretical models remain valid longer than conclusions derived from a specific media platform. Last, from a media perspective, it is equally critical to acknowledge and appreciate the externalities of media. The overwhelming focus of many studies is on the negative impacts, such as misinformation, polarisation, and social disintegration, while media offer avenues for creative expression, social interaction, and civic engagement. Digital platforms can lower the barrier to participation, facilitate novel means of narrative creation, and reinforce diasporic and marginalised communities (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2015). For the most part, the media effects limitations recognised in the literature are substantial in nature, but dwell predominantly on user variability, situational technological environments, and behavioural usage patterns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Educators and Schools

Teachers are crucial in enabling students' understanding in engaging with the fundamental and shaping aspects of their world, and the media is one of them. As a point of departure, teachers are expected to integrate Media and Information Literacy (MIL) within all other subjects as opposed to treating MIL as a stand-alone or an optional course. This ensures that students get the opportunity to learn the respective curricula within the framework of media analysis and production, which is an indispensable aspect of any digital civilisation (UNESCO,

2011; Hobbs, 2010). Furthermore, schools need to provide instruction in algorithms and data literacy so that students understand how ranking and other online systems determine which information to send as a recommendation. Knowing how to manage students' social media accounts, which we call responsible social media use, entails understanding how advertisements and algorithmic personalisation work. Methods of assessment should also change. Alongside written examinations, teachers can also integrate production-based assessments such as the creation of news packages, podcasts, and explainer videos. Such activities enable students to implement theoretical aspects of the concepts and frameworks within which students appreciate the necessity of ethical behaviour and ethical decision-making in politics.

For Policymakers and Funders

Currently, creators and benefactors have a heavy influence on how media serves society, and therefore have considerable power over its direction. Primarily, they should fund media that is in the public interest, support Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs, and should also fund independent journalism, as it safeguards democracy through the provision of reputable information along with a plurality of voices (UNESCO, 2011). Preparing educators through the provision of MIL open educational resources will also equip students with the necessary skills to critically engage as responsible media users and content creators (Hobbs, 2010). In addition, governments should advance the policies of transparency regarding platform data and access for independent research. Allowing independent evaluators to review algorithms and content moderation practices, in exchange for user data privacy, will promote accountability in moderation (Gillespie, 2018).

As advocates of social connectivity, policymakers and funders should encourage comprehension, connectivity, and constructive engagement of citizens with the media system, coupled with civic responsibility. Investments tailored to these ends can help citizens engage knowledgeably with social information and thereby positively contribute to the public sphere. (UNESCO, 2011; Hobbs, 2010; Gillespie, 2018; Livingstone, 2004).

For Platforms and Media Producers

Media outlets and producers influence how and in what forms information flows through a society. In the case of producers and platforms, to advocate purposeful and constructive interactions with information, the main focus should be the promotion and support of the growth of positive digital spaces. One of the initial efforts is to design for 'healthy' defaults, so there is deliberate slowness in user-initiated sharing of potentially harmful, unverified, or misleading information. For instance, minor, timed interruptions that require a user's attention to a fact-check or reminder may break the impulsive sharing flow. This is a way of censoring or controlling, within the bounds of free speech and free sharing, the free flow of harmful information (Gillespie, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In the ideal case of pluralism in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), unverified and diverse information should be available for users to access. Another critically important step is the formulation and publication of metrics for transparency. Platforms can earn public trust by releasing information that demonstrates how certain data is amplified, hidden, or deleted.

For platforms, promotion of freedom of speech, protection of user privacy, and the duty to curtail extreme information should not be in opposition. According to Gillespie (2018), the accessibility and simplicity of reports regarding the diversity of exposure, recommender systems, and latent content moderation remain an important issue, so that scholars, policymakers, and the general populace understand the operation of these systems within a society. Without these in-depth accounts, targeted censorship systems would have undisputedly more power. Gaps in reporting, routing information, and control of the noise will lead to more obfuscation; hence, transparency becomes a necessity.

CONCLUSION

Mass media is not ancillary to civic life and culture; it is the means by which social meaning is constructed and the fundamental framework through which socio-cultural selves are projected. The media stories shape actions, build perceptions of reality, construct identities and offer a range of possibilities. However, the effects of media are not universal and automatic. They are a product of audience agency, the social environment, the message itself, and the politics governing the media industry and platforms. For all forms of education, the frame is both hopeful and dire. Dire, because students currently inhabit worlds where their attention is bought and sold, and where information ecologies are abundant, but voicing and visibility are not equally distributed. Hopeful, because pedagogy, literacy and the institutions can broaden the empathic, responsible and action-oriented inquiry of students to the point where their citizenship is creative. Students are not to be protected from media, rather they are to be trained in critical, constructive participation to challenge harmful narratives, amplify inclusive stories and construct healthier public spheres.

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