New & Emerging Media – Theory

In 2001, a research paper by Lev Manovich from the MIT press began by describing new and emerging media as "texts distributed on a computer (Web sites and electronic books)" (Manovich 43). Manovich then continued to refine this definition by explaining that "New media represents a convergence of two separate historical trajectories: computing and media technologies" (Manovich 44). Although Manovich's interpretation is certainly correct, it is clear that throughout the past 14 years the concept of new and emerging media has evolved and expanded to include interactive and social elements.

Aside from the digital element that separates new media from traditional media, new and emerging media is reflective of the interactive culture of today. The Iowa State University Studio for New Media describes new media as "a family of genres that involve digital media: like 'poetry' or 'the novel', each new media format could be conceptualized as a collection of styles of production which have implications for the sort of content appropriate within the style" (Iowa, 2014, p.1). New media used to refer to a list of technology types or facets such as CDs, DVDs, HTML and web applications. Now the pool has expanded and changes constantly, emulating the needs of consumers and content producers. Despite this broadening of the definition to include things like blogs, social media and other interactive platforms, Manovich's initial thoughts on this revolution in 2001 still reign true today: "This new revolution is arguably more profound than the previous ones and we are just beginning to sense its initial effects" (Manovich 43). New media is constantly changing and evolving to adapt to our changing methods of communication.

One theoretical perspective that points towards the future of new and emerging media is the idea that media and technology will increasingly reflect human characteristics as populations further settle in online. While society enjoys digital communication, humans are constantly looking for ways to make technology and social platforms fit more closely with their natural day-to-day lives in order

to operate simultaneously in both the physical and digital worlds. In an article from the Cambridge University Press, "Computers, in the way that they communicate, instruct, and take turns interacting, are close enough to human that they encourage social responses" (Reeves & Nass 22). Humans crave social interaction and as society continues to increase their reliance and interaction digitally, media applications and technologies will reflect those cravings. An example of this is the development of current online communities in education. The Journal of Education Technology and Society explains that traditional digital communication is not appealing to users as "text to be misinterpreted due to the lack of visual expressiveness by the participants involved" (McInnerney & Roberts 76). McInnerney and Roberts suggest that media and social platforms will become more focused on reflecting digital, interpersonal interaction. Traditional media platforms are text-heavy and limit how humans can interact with one another and also limit how humans interact with digital applications. It's no surprise that photo, audio and video sharing has surpassed text-based status updates on social media platforms. New media of the future will begin to mirror our physical, real life experience with our digital experience, blurring lines between both worlds.

Internet Addiction/Isolation

One key social issue that has cropped up especially in countries with an enormous gaming culture is the obsessive nature of individuals using the Internet. With such a wealth of information and entertainment at people's fingertips, it's no surprise that many get consumed in the Web. The offerings of media online not only provide a distraction from the real world, but can also become a substitute to real world behavior. Treatment centers like the Bradford Regional Medical Center in Pennsylvania have started offering programs to help individuals deal with this condition. According to Program Director Kimberly Young, Psy.D, "Internet Addiction is defined as any online-related, compulsive behavior which interferes with normal living and causes severe stress on family, friends, loved ones, and one's work environment" (Young, 2015, p.1). The behavior can be debilitating both

physically and emotionally. Young points out that "They are willing to sacrifice what they cherish most in order to preserve and continue their behavior" (Young, 2015, p.1). Although there are widespread negative perceptions of this compulsive behavior, many feel that the "addiction" is simply a behavioral preference and not a medical condition. It may be frowned upon due to the decrease in normal social interaction, but often Internet "addicts" lead relatively healthy and productive lives. A study in Computers & Education on Taiwanese college students stated that "the Internet provides user-friendly interfaces, and a convenient medium for checking information and communicating with others" (Chou & Hsiao, 2000, p.66). College students have a unique combination of required Internet use for scholarly purposes as well as a social inclination to interact online. This means that they are using the Internet in "staggering" amounts, yet aren't necessarily addicted. Excessive Internet use has become essential. Regardless of what is correct, it's clear that there are gray areas depending on who's weighing in.

Internet Privacy

Another important issue that spans across the society, economy and more is the that of Internet privacy. An article in the Communications of the ACM - Digital Rights Management magazine explains that "there is little legal protection of consumer information acquired online— either voluntarily or involuntarily—with the exception of some financial or medical transactions or collecting information from children" (Earp & Baumer, 2003, p. 81). The accessibility of information online can be an asset to both innocent and harmful users. The anonymity of the Web also creates a shield against perpetrators making it difficult to prosecute. With new and emerging media, more and more information is being sent and stored online as a means of convenience. With more information, there is an increased risk. It seems that consumers are aware of the issue, but make Internet security decisions based on company reputation. For example, Earp and Baumer's study on consumer

behavior and online privacy looked at how safe individuals felt their personal information was on different websites.

> Consumers are more willing to provide their home address, phone number, email address, Social Security number, and credit card number to a well-known site compared to a lesser-known site, in part because they have no confidence the e-commerce legal environment is secure. (Earp & Baumer, 2003, p. 82)

Although most would agree that Internet privacy is almost never guaranteed, there are some who feel as if the situation is significantly improving. The quote from Computers and Security in 1995 regarding continued advancements in password protection technology is still being referenced today: "It has often been said that 'good fences make good neighbors'...a good fence at least helps keep out the bad neighbors" (Bishop & Klein, 1995, 24). Cybersecurity measures like CAPTCHA programs, encryption software, advanced identification screening technology and more allow for more protection than ever on the Web.

The Future of Internet Addiction/Isolation

With technological dependence increasing in the future, the parameters of internet addiction will likely expand or even disappear. Although it's unlikely that the Internet will completely replace all aspects of human behavior, the interconnectedness of humans and computer technology will become a normal and accepted way of life. It's reasonable to predict that compulsive internet use will become an expected necessity in order to keep up with tech-centric lifestyle. The Internet Keep Safe Coalition said that "kids ages eight to 18 [spend] on average 44.5 hours per week in front of screens" (iKeepSafe, 2015, p.1). At over six hours of screen use per day and growing, the amount of time Internet addicts may spend in front of a screen could match up with national averages. These increasing similarities may make it more difficult to justify or define this type of behavior, leading to misdiagnosis, mistreatment or an Internet-addicted society.

The Future of Internet Privacy

As mentioned previously, there are different ideas to the nature of online security in the future. The majority tends to reason that with more users and information online than ever before, it is impossible to keep up with protecting information. Increasingly the Internet is being used as a political tool for malicious acts of terrorism and other related activities. The value of the Web makes it not only vulnerable, but also marked with a giant target. Online security is only as secure as it's creator could manufacture, which means that as long as there are talented hackers and cybercriminals at the top of their field, Internet privacy will never be as advanced as it needs to be.

When taking into consideration various theoretical perspectives, it is clear that both Internet addiction and Internet security will continue to evolve and new and emerging media continues to evolve. With increased social interactivity and online sharing, the personal and social reliance on these platforms will follow suite along with the potential threats. Media will become no longer an assistant to communication and human behavior, but the environment and vehicle of knowledge and change. New York Times journalist Eric Pfanner described this by saying "the convergence of digital media and technology, under way since the dawn of the Internet, will accelerate. Distinctions between old and new media will fade; most media will be digital" (Pfanner, 2013, 1). As media accelerates and evolves, Internet addiction and security issues will do the same.

An Emerging Media on the Horizon

A newer form of media that is taking hold quickly with media consumers is the photo-sharing platform Instagram. Described on the company website as "a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures"(Instagram, 2015, n.p.), the company positions their application as a way to share experiences and preserve memories in a visually appealing way. Available free for users, the application offers filters that "transform your photos into professional-looking snapshots"(Instagram, 2015, n.p.). According to an article by Danielle Saloman from the

Association of College and Research Libraries, Instagram "reaches a young, urban, and diverse

demographic" (Saloman 408). No longer a strictly social platform, Instagram is being embraced by

companies and educational institutions to connect with media users in a visual-centric fashion.

Saloman points out that "at UCLA Powell Library, we have had more success connecting with our

students and engaging in teaching and learning on Instagram than on any other social network we

use" (Saloman 408).

Instagram's rise in popularity connects well with theories on cultivating identity through an

online presence. For example, a qualitative analysis of identity -sharing behaviors by The University

of North Carolina at Chapel Hill concluded that "there is a disconnect between the value of

traditional identity information (Name, SSN) and the new types identity information being disclosed

(photo, political views, sexual orientation)"(Stutzman 7). The new generation of media users is being

pulled away from conventional forms of identity-sharing seen on social media platforms like

Facebook and choosing to express themselves more abstractly and artistically. Instagram offers a

streamlined space with minimal profile information and textual expression that caters to this

demographic. The exclusivity of photos and videos displays how Instagram is mirroring in-person,

real life interaction. Users feel as if they are closer to their friends and fellow content-creators

because of this shift away from "colder" forms of online interaction like text communication or

email. It's possible that in the future Instagram may adapt this concept even further with live video

feeds or the ability to comment via video or picture to enhance the visual aspect of communication.

My Future

When counseling an organization on developing a new and emerging media plan, I would first

identify the organization's industry and goals. Deciding a company's relationship with media

depends a lot on what they are trying to accomplish and who their target audience is. Assuming the

organization is not an unusual exception, it is probable that they would need to have a strong online

presence. I would sit down with the marketing team and identify their consumers' demographics and digital footprint. How are your customers using the Internet? What kinds of things do they engage with online? Knowing where and how the organization's target audience is interacting online will determine how to approach a media plan. I would identify a list of relevant social media platforms to be active on as a company, as well as ways to incorporate social dimensions into the company website. Ensuring a responsive and user-friendly website that encourages interaction will be an important factor. I would then have the company brainstorm tangible ways their brand identity could be expressed digitally. Is the brand hip and fun? If so, media content should reflect that both visually and through their language. I would express the importance of having a media presence that is consistent, cohesive and indicates quality.

Of course simply catering to users does not ensure a successful media plan. Catering to search engines will also be important. While our culture gravitates towards visual content like pictures and video, companies will need to find ways to adapt this without neglecting the needs for search engines to categorize content. Textual information will still have a place in any media plan but will need to be properly balanced with visual content.

New and emerging media will definitely be a part of my future profession. I hope to eventually be a director of digital content, which will mean staying relevant on new media trends and effectively organizing them to benefit the goals of a company or organization. Being able to understand, utilize and direct digital content will be a crucial skill I will need to have. Although I already have a lot of experience with social media and other traditional media types, there is a lot I will need to learn. I will likely need to learn more about the manipulation of photos and videos for content creation. I will also need to get hands-on experience with all new media types, instead of only ones I prefer to use personally. For example, there are certain applications that I do not use such as Foursquare or Tumblr because they do not interest me for my personal life. As someone who will be

working every day with new and emerging media, I will need to embrace all platforms and explore

the possibilities professionally, despite my lack of interest for personal use. Keeping up on the newest

media will ensure that I will be able to experience and predict its future.

Learning about the extent of new and emerging media's interconnectedness has changed my

perspective on digital media. Although I already understood the importance and impact of digital

media, I had not previously considered how different forms of media and different social platforms

have converged so closely in recent years. Content creation and management is no longer black and

white. Media controls societal views of nearly everything from world issues to individual

representations. I was particularly surprised by how blogging has become something professional and

commercialized – a far cry from just a personal, online diary. Learning about professionals who use

blogs to distribute company content or represent a brand has changed my perspective on the power of

blogging. I feel that I will take blog content more seriously as a media consumer because of this class

and will also consider using blogging as a professional development tool throughout my career.

Seeing the reach of professional bloggers and how any individual's thoughts and ideas can affect so

many has broadened my respect and appreciation for this form of social media.

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