



Recitation 11 - Authenticity in the Age of Social Media

or

How to Harness Disintermediation, Cheap Technology and "Crowd-Sourcing" before it Harnesses You

OBJECTIVE

Reinforce lessons about the impacts of the ubiquitous web on News and on News Consumers. This recitation can also prime students to think about responsibilities consumers have in the Digital Age, when they are publishers as well as consumers. We offer several exercises, anticipating you will pick and choose based on your judgment of what your class needs.

Organization

1. Attendance and announcements

News Quiz

- a) No quiz at Stony Brook this week. In-recitation mid-term test

Recap Lecture

Impact of the Internet Revolution

Prompt student reaction to the following developments with the Web. An effective technique is to solicit their ideas on the positive effects of the internet, list them on the board, and then add others from the below list if necessary.

Lecture Outcomes:

1. Explain the crisis of authenticity caused by the anonymity of social and digital media
2. Understand the particular challenges news consumers face when searching social and digital media for actionable information.
2. Use specific examples to illustrate the difference between reliable and unreliable information found on social media
3. Articulate the particular danger cognitive dissonance poses to news consumers seeking actionable information on social media

Positive Effects

1. Speed of transmission (Saddam execution video; political developments)
2. Amplification of Message to huge (even global) audience



3. Cheap Information (if not free)...impact on the newspaper business
4. Interactivity...news consumers can be partners in creating news and providing feedback (comments section, rating news stories).
5. Democratization of the news media...new and diverse voices can be heard.
6. New competition for mainstream news organizations...barriers of entry are lower. Paper and presses and trucks aren't needed
7. Virtual boundaries disappear...a powerful challenge to censorship and autocratic regimes (In China and Iran) as we have discussed.
8. Unprecedented storage and retrieval of information and news on demand.
9. Customization of news
10. Direct access to primary sources and documents
11. New sources of peer review (In the Rather case, the faulty evidence used in Rather's story on Pres. Bush's Air National Guard service was exposed by an internet news site. Also remember that Steven Glass was exposed by Forbes Digital website.)
12. More choice...means it is easier to compare and access multiple news sources and outlets.

Negative Implications

1. Information overload and fatigue, tendency to become passive consumers in response to an overabundance of information
2. Spread of disinformation (911 conspiracy theories, the "birther" movement, etc.)
3. Unfiltered and unverified information
4. Blurring of news and opinion—labeling isn't always as clear online as it is in newspapers and on TV
5. Confusion as to who is a journalist (prompt discussion of "Citizen Journalism"). What qualifies someone to be a journalist?
6. Narrow-casting...only access to information that reinforces a point of view (Refer back to Nicholas Kristof's column entitled "The Daily Me")
7. Destabilizing mainstream media...where does the hard information come from?

Class Discussion

Option 1. "Social Media" Exercise

Ask students if they ever: forward an email, post a link on their personal blog, "like" a news story posted to Facebook, follow or retweet a Twitter feed, +1, stumbleupon, digg, etc.

- *Do you perceive information differently depending on where it comes from?*
- *Does it affect your judgment of the reliability of information if you see that the story is highly rated (by users), well "liked" or if a lot of people "digg it"?*

Ask:

- *If you share, repost, or email information that is hurtful or false, what is your responsibility?*



- *Ask yourself: should you hold yourself to a higher standard than the person who created or first posted the harmful material?*
- *Consider potential harm: i.e. the video of Tyler Clementi, the Rutgers student, who killed himself after his roommate set up a web-cam to “catch” Clementi kissing another student; the video was widely shared among Clementi’s peers, who socially tormented him.*

Wrap up with student suggestions about best practices for news information that is shared online, knowing what we now know about the core values and practices of journalism (VIA).

Option 2. “The Medium is the Message” exercise

It may be helpful or entertaining to show one or both of these videos first:

- A warm and fuzzy rendering of Marshall McLuhan, Famous Canadian:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtycdRBAAbXk>

- The “Annie Hall” scene in which Woody Allen wins an argument with a film professor by dragging Marshall McLuhan into the frame to settle a point about McLuhan:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpIYz8ffGjY&feature=related>

The exercise begins with writing: “*The medium is the message*” on the blackboard in large letters and asking the class who said it and what that means. (See this week’s “background pack” for an explanation.) Then, tell the student the purpose of the exercise:

- *Together, we have explored print -- newspapers and magazines -- and, more recently, TV and the power of images. And we’re about to take a much closer look at the internet as a news medium.*

Students are to sort themselves into three groups of news consumers, each representing a different medium: print, TV/radio, internet

- *How many of you get your news from newspapers or magazines, even occasionally? (bring those students forward to one corner of the room).*
- *How many among the rest of you would say TV and radio are your primary sources of news? (bring those students forward to the other corner of the room).*
- *If you’re still sitting down, welcome to the Internet news team.*

Now, depending on how close to a third of the class each of these groups represent, you might volunteer some of the others to fill out each of the first two groups.

- *You each have 15 minutes to huddle in the classroom or one of the hallways to come up with the top 5 advantages your medium gives news consumers and then 5 drawbacks of each of the other two mediums.*
- *Also, be prepared to discuss if and how your medium skews the news. Pick a leader and someone to take notes and use your time effectively. It starts now!*

Bring them back in and have the leader and note-taker come to the front of the class to present. After each does, let a representative of each of the other two teams present the top three weakness of the medium. Discuss, prodding them toward questions about the difference between the Gutenberg revolution and the revolution brought about by the Web.



Option 3. Sorting Fact from Fiction

1. Break the class into groups and give each group a story to read. Some groups should work with real stories, and some groups should work with made-up stories. Here are a few options:

Strange but true:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/15/patrick-campbell-homeless-doctor-hospital_n_2879063.html?utm_hp_ref=weird-news

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/14/algae-fossils-sri-lanka-meteorite_n_2870758.html?utm_hp_ref=weird-news

<http://now.msn.com/skull-reaper-a-ji-banned-from-city-council-meetings-because-of-wrestling-mask>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/15/sex-in-space-conception-study-university-of-montreal_n_2883577.html?utm_hp_ref=weird-news

Fake:

<http://www.theonion.com/articles/pfizer-kingpin-gunned-down-in-ongoing-prescription,31678/>

<http://www.theonion.com/articles/value-of-us-dollar-plummets-after-joe-flacco-signs,31571/>

<http://www.snopes.com/politics/socialsecurity/illegal.asp>

2. Have the groups try to determine whether the story is true or false, and decide whether to forward it to a relative. Have them list the reasons supporting their conclusions.
3. Have each group share their ideas with the class. Have the groups pose questions to one another, see if they agree or disagree. Once they've all presented, reveal the origins and veracity of the stories.