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## Functionalist perspective of mass media

The entry introduces functionalism as a theory and as an analytical method for analyzing mass communication media as a social system. Assumptions about functionalism as treated in sociology by Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton are briefly introduced. Groundbreaking functionalist studies in mass communication research are referred to, and examples of classical typologies of media functions are included. The post ends with postmodern and postcolonial criticism of functionalism. Page 2 Wiley-Blackwell and the International Communication Association present the latest addition to the landmark The Wiley Blackwell-ICA International Encyclopedias of Communication series. This is now available in 4-volume prints and online, and is the definitive reference work with communication theory and philosophy. Today's and comprehensive. The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy is the ultimate resource for scientific reflection on key issues in the subject, covering the history, systematics and potential of communication theory. Contributions are multinational and interdisciplinary, with authors from Europe, North America, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Page 3 Augmented Reality (AR) is a growing communication medium. AR involves the overlay of digital content on the individual's direct experience of reality. This entry examines the nature of augmented reality, its history, central concepts and central figures. The listing also examines the evolving AR user experience and technology, as well as the implications for communication. It's hard to imagine a theory or theoretical perspective that can explain the diversity of ways people interact with technology and the media. The technology goes from the fight you turn to lighting a light all the way up to sophisticated nuclear power plants that can power the factory where that light was made. The media can refer to the TV you're watching, the ads that pack the bus you take to work or school, or the magazines you browse in the dentist's waiting room, not to mention all forms of new media, including Instagram, Facebook, blogs, YouTube and the like. Is media and technology essential to humanity's advancing march? Are they harmful capitalist tools that lead to the exploitation of workers all over the world? Are they the magic bullet the world has been waiting for to level the playing field and lift the world's poor out of extreme poverty? Choose an opinion, and you will find studies and scientists who agree with you - and those who disagree. Because functionalism focuses on how media and technology contribute to society's smooth functioning, a good place to start understanding this perspective is to write a list of functions you perceive media and technology to perform. Your list may include the ability to find information on the Internet, your TV's entertainment value, or how advertising and product placement to social norms. TV commercials can carry significant cultural currency. For some, the ads during the Super Bowl are more water cooler than the game itself. (Photo courtesy of Dennis Yang/flickr) As you might guess, with almost every American household having a TV, and the 250 billion hours of TV watched annually by people in the United States, companies that want to connect with consumers find television an irresistible platform to promote their goods and services (Nielsen 2012). TV advertising is a highly functional way to meet a market demographic where it lives. Sponsors can use the sophisticated data collected by network and cable TV companies regarding their viewers and target their advertising accordingly. Whether you're watching comics on Nick Jr. or a cooking show at Telemundo, there's a good chance advertisers have a plan to reach you. And it certainly doesn't stop with TV. Commercial advertising precedes films in theaters and pops up on and inside public transport, as well as on the sides of buildings and roads. Big companies like Coca-Cola are bringing their advertising into public schools, by sponsoring sports fields or tournaments, as well as filling the halls and cafeterias of these schools with vending machines hawkng their goods. With growing concerns about childhood obesity and accompanying diseases, the era of soda machines in schools can be numbered. In fact, as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Healthy, The Hunger Free Kids Act and Michelle Obama's Let's Move! The initiative, a ban on junk food in schools began in July 2014. An obvious manifesto function of the media is its entertainment value. Most people, when asked why they watch TV or go to the movies, would answer that they like it. And the numbers certainly illustrate it. While the Nielsen research from 2012 shows a slight reduction of American homes with TV, the reach of TELEVISION is still enormous. And the time spent watching is just as great. It is clear that joy is essential. On the technology side, there is also a clear entertainment factor for the use of new innovations. From online gaming to chatting with friends on Facebook, technology offers new and more exciting ways for people to entertain themselves. Even as the media sells us goods and entertains us, it also serves to socialize us and help us pass on standards, values, and beliefs to the next generation. In fact, we are socialized and resocialized by the media throughout our lives. All forms of media teach us what is good and desirable, how to talk, how to behave, and how to respond to events. The media also gives us cultural touchstones during events of national importance. How many of your elderly relatives can remember watching the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger on TV? How many of them who read this textbook followed the events of September 11 or Hurricane Katrina on TV or Just as in Anderson and Bushman's (2011) evidence in violence in the media and video games: Does it matter? The debate still exists over the scope and impact of media socialization. A recent study (Krahe et al. 2011) showed that violent media content has a desensitizing effect and is correlated with aggressive thoughts. Another group of researchers (Gentile, Mathieson and Crick 2011) found that among children exposure to media violence led to an increase in both physical and relational aggression. Nevertheless, a meta-analysis study covering four decades of research (Savage 2003) failed to establish a definitive link between seeing violence and committing criminal violence. It is clear from watching people mimic the styles of dress and talk that appear in the media that the media has a socializing influence. What is not clear, despite nearly fifty years of empirical research, is how much social interaction affects the media compared to other socialization agents, which includes any social institution that goes along norms, values and beliefs (such as peers, family, religious institutions and the like). As the media entertains many forms of technology, an arena for commercialization and socializes us. For example, some studies suggest that the rising obesity rate is correlated with the decrease in physical activity caused by an increase in the use of certain forms of technology, a latent function of the presence of media in society (Kauaiainen et al. 2011). Without a doubt, a manifest function of technology is to change our lives, and sometimes for the worse. Think about how the digital age has improved the ways we communicate. Have you ever used Skype or another webcast to talk to a friend or family member far away? Or maybe you've organized a fund drive, which collects thousands of dollars, all from your desk chair. The disadvantage of this ongoing flow of information, of course, is the near impossibility of disconnecting from technology that leads to an expectation of constant practical access to information and people. Such a fast-paced dynamic is not always to our advantage. Some sociologists argue that this level of media exposure leads to narcotizing dysfunction, a result in which people are too overwhelmed with media input to really care about the issue, so their engagement is defined by consciousness rather than by action (Lazerfeld and Merton 1948). 1. When it comes to media and technology, a functionalist would focus on: the symbols created and rendered by the media association of technology and technological skills with men so that different forms of media socialize users the digital distinction between the technological oceans and have-nots Share this: Facebook Twitter ReddItIn WhatsApp For example, makes the abundance of ways to find and report news , through online forums, blogs, YouTube, etc., available to the average citizen undermine the hegemonic role of traditional news media in this Discuss from a functional, Marxist or other sociological perspective. Get help with your essay If you need help writing your essay, our professional essay writing service is here to help! Find out more Introduction The mass media plays an important role in today's society. Functionalism emphasizes its strength, but warns of the danger of having its power controlled by a few individuals or organizations. That hegemony was threatened with the creation of the World Wide Web. Twenty-first century internet technology now offers every citizen the potential to reach an audience of millions. The main sociological concepts for analyzing the media's impact are well-established, and later commentators often reinterpret existing theories instead of offering new perspectives. Two macro theories, both of which see society as a system that shapes human behavior, dominate the discussions: the functionalist attitude and the Marxist conflict perspectives. This essay will draw on Parsons, Merton and Wright to present the classic functionalist point of view. Conflict theory offers several interpretations of Marxism, which serves as a criticism. This essay will detail the popularity of the most widely used mainstream sites and consider the social media role in news gathering and dissemination. Examples of traditional and modern media coverage will illustrate changing attitudes and societal mores and the capacity of social media to trigger change, before using a functional analysis to assess whether the sociological function of the mass media has been influenced by modern technological developments. Social theory and media Functionalism, a structural perspective and a leading sociological attitude from the 1940s and 1950s, consider society to be a interdependent system that can only be understood by examining how separate structural parts relate to each other and society as a whole. The traditional mass media, mainly newspapers and cinema, reached their peak during this period, so it is not surprising that sociologists used functionalism to analyze the media and society. Functionalism makes certain assumptions, including the need for stability, and examines the origin and maintenance of order and stability in society (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004: xv). Functionalism suggests that the common perspective and shared experience of the mass media binds society together. Parsons (1964) argued that social behavior is governed by shared values that become societal norms, a consensus of values that allows society to function effectively. Functionalism is value-neutral, disruptive activities are dysfunctional rather than inherently poor; defunct values are being eradicated. Merton (1968), which remained within the functionalist tradition, felt that functional unity was unlikely in complex societies, and that all functions, whether of religion, social stratification or even the family itself, could be met elsewhere in society. He divorced latent (hidden/accidental) functions of the media. A manifest function may be the need to sell goods for profit. Latent features including supporting the status quo by amplifying values. (Merton, 1968). Charles Wright developed what became known as the classic four features of the media. He stated that media theorists 'noted three activities of communication specialists: (1) monitoring the environment, (2) correlation of the parts of society in responding to the environment, and (3) the transfer of the social legacy from one generation to the next (Wright, 1959:16). He also identified a fourth element - entertainment - and distinguished between the intended purpose of the mass media and its consequences. While functionalists believe that societal norms govern human behavior, Marxists argue that the controlling factor is the economic system. They offer a conflict perspective in which the mass media legitimizes the status quo, enabling hegemonic control over the spread of information. Marx claimed that elite members produced the dominant social ideas to hide the exploitation of the working class while the mass media manipulated information to normalize inequality (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). Functionalism has also been criticized on the grounds that the values that are believed to characterize Western society have never been definitively demonstrated, and the content of values rather than value consensus as such can be seen as the decisive factor with respect to social order (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004:943). Old and new mass media The time delay between reporting and printing left newspapers one day behind in publishing events; the visual effect of tv was instant. The Vietnam War was the first televised conflict. The iconic image of nine-year-old Kim Phuc running naked down a road outside Saigon after a napalm attack helped turn public opinion toward continued US involvement (Newton and Patterson, 2015). In the world of traditional media, the potential impact of the internet was underestimated by commentators such as Clifford Stoll. Writing in Newsweek, he said: The truth is no online database will replace your daily newspaper [and] no computer network will change the way the government works (Stoll, 1995). He was clearly wrong on both points, but at the time few people had access to the new form of media that had been developed by enthusiastic amateurs, academics and students. (Rheingold, 1994). According to Pew Research (2015), Yahoo - the world's largest on-line news service - attracted 127,955,000 unique visitors in January 2015. A Google search of the traditional media reveals that the BBC guarantees an impressive 793,000,000 Google entries, while The Times newspaper has 398,000,000. However, these numbers are dwarfed by social media listings: YouTube has 7,540,000,000 entries, Twitter has 11,350,000,000 and Facebook tops the poll with 15,050,000,000 (information collected 27.8.2015). On Monday, August 24, 2015, it was reported that a billion people - a seventh of the world's population - logged into their Facebook accounts (Zuckerberg, 2015). Digital communication normalizes the rapid spread of information. Anyone with a smartphone could potentially break a major news story; The first images of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 came from mobile phone footage. 'Micro-blogging' is event-driven; Twitter provides users with a regular feed of news and trivia. Stories that are tweeted at or commented frequently are said to be trending. But with a limit of 140 characters per tweet, brevity still controls occasionally, just as it did when news of the Crimean War was transmitted to The UK via telegraph. Discussion Historically, a relatively small group of people working for an even smaller and more exclusive group of newspaper, film and broadcasting organizations gathered information. They decided what to make public and how it should be presented. Deciding what to omit was probably as important as deciding what to include; stories that present the establishment in a negative light were often suppressed. Certain reports, decades apart but linked by a common thread, bridge the gap between traditional media and the digital age and illustrate changing attitudes in the UK. During the Abdication crisis of 1936, despite being spread elsewhere, British media first ignored the affair between Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson for the sake of King George V (Rubenstein, 2003:199). However, less deference was shown to Princess Margaret; MP Willie Hamilton, who regularly raised the issue of the royal finances in the House of Commons, described her as a floozy .... a monstrous charge on the public purse'. (Davies, 2002, np). The rise of celebrity culture also gave rise to paparazzi, an independent cohort of photographers, who followed and photographed members of the royal family at every opportunity. Earl Spencer's passionate ed at the funeral of his sister, Princess Diana, blamed the paparazzi for her death, describing Diana as the most hunted person of modern times (Princess Diana 97, 1997). More recently, compromising photos of Prince Harry on a trip to Las Vegas were circulated online by the US celebrity website TMZ.com (TMZ, 2012). What used to be news is now entertainment. There are a number of potential dangers in the media's functions. Analysis accompanying fact reporting affects public opinion, but undisputed norms and values can uphold injustice; one only needs to remember the depiction of racial minorities in the media of the 1950s. Entertainment can act as propaganda, as in jingoistic films released during World War II. Nevertheless, deciding what information goes into the public arena may still have hegemonic undertones, as demonstrated by a BBC Newsnight investigation into Jimmy Savile. This was drawn briefly before a tribute programme to celebrity, believed to have abused hundreds of children, was due to broadcast. Members of the investigation team were sidelined amid allegations of a leadership coverage (Jackson, 2015). Wright's observation between the intended and unintended consequences of the media is particularly relevant to the new social media. In late 2010, mass demonstrations against political repression, poverty and corruption swept the Middle East during the short-lived Arab Spring uprising. Authorities were unable to suppress the outflow of information via social media. The Tunisian government was the first to fall. The hegemony of their state-sanctioned news agencies had been completely undermined. But organizations like ISIS also use social media to spread their message, recruit followers and boast about their terrible achievements (Albaili, 2014). From the value-neutral functionalist attitude (Wright, 1974) this is not evil, but only dysfunctional from the paradigm of Western culture; ISIS communicates, comments and shares its value system to gain broader acceptance of its fundamentalist values. Unlike Stoll predictions (Stoll, 1995) internet use spread. Some features of the new media, such as the collection and dissemination of information, clearly originate from their traditional ancestors, but news is a globalized and a 24/7 product that has given rise to a celebrity cult (Hollander, 2010). Gatekeepers cannot determine what constitutes news when a story can go viral without warning, although unedited on-line content can be disturbing. Recently, the world was horrified by the killings on live TELEVISION by a reporter and cameraman, in an attack filmed by the gunman and later circulated by him on social media. Such events question the wisdom of facilitating unmediated access to what were once the airwaves. But the special discussion is beyond the scope of this essay. Social media has been shown to instigate social change. The viral impact of the YouTube video 'Kodaikanal Won't' forced Unilever to remove mercury waste from its defunct factory in Tamil Nadu (Kasmin, 2015). Social movements such as anti-globalization campaigns use social media very effectively to spread their message. Charities and NGOs regularly exploit their power, and it is said that US President Barack Obama owed his electoral success to his team's mastery of social media. Just this week, the image of a lifeless Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian refugee washed up on a Turkish beach, galvanized public opinion around the world, although one fears that effective policy measures to solve the refugee crisis could take quite a longer time. Mainstream broadcasters have embraced social media, routinely incorporating audience participation by inviting comment via Twitter, text or email. They have websites, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages, as do organizations or individuals who want to raise their Profile. Print media media with declining sales, but on-line services stream news, meaning and entertainment directly into the family home, traditionally seen as the place of transfer of cultural values. Mesch warns that: The introduction of new technologies such as the internet in the household could potentially change the quality of family relationships (Mesch, 2006:119, quoted in McGrath, 2012:9). This effect is particularly strong on children growing up with digital media, literally, at their fingertips, and a trend towards individualisation in households is undermining natural family interaction (Buckingham 2000:43). Discussion of the features that are fulfilled by family life is beyond the scope of this essay, but the question underscores concerns about communication via the new social media has become a substitute for face-to-face interaction and whether social media can actually maintain the social fabric of traditional family life - and, by implication, society as we know it - across generations. Although one sincerely hopes otherwise, Merton's (1968) analysis suggesting the possible extinction of functional family life may be prophetic. Conclusion Functionalists have been criticized for seeing social order in the form of value consensus on the grounds that consensus is assumed, not proven, to exist. Critics also note that research has not shown widespread commitment to the values that are believed to underpin Western society, suggesting that value content is the determining factor (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). Marxism argues that functionalism does not explain social conflict, and sees the mass media as another tool used by the elite to maintain its power and privilege. Social media news content is clearly not controlled in the conventional sense and posts can disrupt the status quo, affecting political and social change. This strength has reduced hegemony, although organisations such as the BBC still exert editorial control over the old media. Ideologically driven campaigns from the left such as the anti-globalization movement have been able to use social media to publish their activities like never before. The differences between conflicting sets of cultural values are brought into sharp focus as social media follows events in the Middle East and elsewhere, bringing our unstable, it will vile the dysfunctional world into our homes. McGrath (2012) warns that social media can have a far-reaching impact on family life; Merton (1968) argued that any function, including the family unit itself, was dispensable and that society would always find an alternative. These matters cannot be discussed here, but they warrant clear investigation. Upon reflection, news can be trivial or disturbing, the message can travel faster and further, and the values transmitted can be radically different from previous generations, but despite the impact of social media, its features - collect and spread news, transmit culture and - has been consistent. It is the shifting value content that is disturbing, but functional analysis requires a distinction between functions and effects, so that it cannot provide a valuation. Bibliography Albaili, M (2014). 'How ISIS Captured Social Media' in Al Arabiya News, June 24, 2014. Available on . Retrieved 28 August 2015. Buckingham, David, 2000. 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