

“The New Breed”
José Alberto Vázquez
ID – 4982606
Prof. Judith Nicholson
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José Alberto Vázquez Orozco

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When looking at the current theories of mass media and public media, and what such classifications encompass specifically, it can be seen that both fail to define the Internet and other technologies in their entirety. Mass media covers some aspects of the Internet, insofar as websites, while other forms such as discussion groups, forums, and email can be defined under public media. In this essay, it will further be discussed the differences between mass and public media, how the Internet is related to both, and ultimately, the reasoning for which the creation of a new classification is needed, in order to define with greater precision what the Internet and related technologies such as multimedia presentations, DVDs, and others have to offer. The main ideas behind this new classification, which are further explained when analyzing its characteristics, are the flexibility with the production, distribution and reproduction of the message, the receiver’s role in it, and the involved digital formats.

For decades, the theories of mass communication and mass media have continuously redefined what has already been defined. In his book, “Web.Studies”, David Gauntlett writes that “media products, and their producers, had themselves become self-

analyzing and multi-layered”. He further comments that mainstream television shows and scholars are not going anywhere when stating that they “were already, in themselves, super-analyzed dissections of the style and culture of populist TV. All academics could do was write obvious explanations of what the producers were up to (boring and ultimately sycophantic), or make predictable critiques of what such shows tell us about capitalist or postmodern society (which you could do in your sleep)” (Gauntlett).

Perhaps Gauntlett’s words make it seem that scholars are just looking for new ways to describe the same concepts, and elaborate new theories that do not challenge the old ideas. Even Marshal McLuhan in 1960 wrote that “the advent of a new medium often reveals the lineaments and assumptions, as it were, of an old medium”. (qtd. in Morris) The future of the media is changing, just as it did with the arrival of the radio, followed by that of the television. However in recent times, we have been faced with the introduction of the Internet as a new medium. The mainstream media formats will evolve in the coming years. Nowadays, it is common to find more content on the printed version of the daily newspaper than in the electronic version of it, whereas in the future, the printed version will be more of a recapitulation of the most important pieces drawn from the web content. Entertainment will be bonded to networks of computers and other devices and a constant feedback from the end users will be available to the producers in real time.

The differences between mass media and public media reside in the production process, the signification or fabrication of meaning, and the final intended receiver or

receivers. Some of the differences are that “public communication involves members of the public communicating with each other, while mass communication involves organizations preparing and transmitting information in the name of the public good and, often, with commercial goals in mind” (Lorimer, 32). Another significant difference is the production process, as the mass communication system “restricts message production” (Lorimer, 32). The transmission of the mass media is “from one point to many rather than from point to point” (Lorimer, 32).

The current theories for such media classifications as mass media and public media do not offer a complete definition for the new mediums. Technically, the Internet cannot be placed under the spectrum of either classification, as it has elements of both, thus causing some aspects of the Internet to be declared as mass media, while others as public media. It would be foolish to assume that the Internet is not a real medium (or has the potential to) by itself, or that it does not prove to be important to a new development for delivering media. One of the probable reasons for it may be fear, or technophobia, as Emilio Figueredo states that “the reason may be found in part of a sacred ignorance about the impact and significance of computers in production, elaboration and distribution of content in its diverse forms” (Figueredo).

The Internet is partially classified as mass media do to its having various mass media characteristics. For example, the web page of an important newspaper follows the same process of production; it only differs in the medium used for distribution. Therefore

the content is equally bias in the printed version as in the Web version. The editor took the same corrections and considerations. The strongest links to the definition of mass media in this example is that the content was created by one sender, intended to many receivers, and with the intention of making a profit by placing the ads of sponsors on their website.

The Internet is further classified as public media because it at times portrays the main characteristic of public media: the transmission of the message from point to point, conserving the meaning intended by the sender. The best example is the electronic mail or email. Discussion groups and other interactive types of communication, as instant messages and conversational channels (like IRC chat) resemble telegraph, CB radio, and other forms of common public media.

In order to more precisely define and embrace the Internet as a whole, the need for a new classification, such as “e-media”, must be created, so as not to divide the Internet between both classifications of mass media and public media. Besides “e-media”, several other unofficial terms have surfaced as well for this new media and its coverage, having others also refer to it as “digital media” or simply “new media”. While the name is least important, its characteristics define the new way of bringing the mass media and public media aspects of the Internet together, under a clearer, and ultimately more specific classification.

However, what really is the Internet? To grasp the complete concept of the new classification of e-media we have to understand the medium, its form and its ways. The definition of the Internet according to the Internet Society (ISOC) is “a global network of networks enabling computers of all kinds to directly and transparently communicate and share services throughout much of the world.” Therefore, when the Internet is mentioned, we have to separate it from the most common understanding of it, the Web. The main difference between these two concepts is that the Web “runs over the Internet” (Gauntlett). The Web is “the popular face of the Internet” (Gauntlett) and is made of a particular type of data, the HTML (HyperText Markup Language), which is the information of the web page that the computer builds with the use of a web browser (i.e. Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, etc.). There is also the HTTP protocol that “tells Web browsers where to find web pages and their components” (Gauntlett). This, again, runs over the Internet. Knowing that the Internet represents not only Web pages, but the ability to transfer raw data as well, will broaden and help differentiate e-media from mass and public media.

The characteristics of e-media encompass the current capabilities of the Internet. It is important to mention that the Internet is part of e-media, but e-media is not only the Internet. Several devices like PDAs and DVDs offer the same characteristics as that of e-media. For example, you can download a newspaper to your Palm, make a DVD with your home videos, and exchange text messages and pictures through cell phones, some even let you surf the web. The characteristics of e-media should include some of the following.

E-media is a distinct set of activities, carrying messages far and wide to the end user devices. It can be an active symbol, a meaning-producing agent or just the carrier. It takes from both mass media and public media in that it can construct a reality or deliver the message without further transformation.

Furthermore, e-media involves some particular technological configurations. Just as the newspaper and magazine's formats are configurations for mass media, digital and electronic devices such as computers, DVD players, PDA's (palmtops) and cell phones are formats for e-media. These configurations need to be computer related and present either during the whole production, transmission and reproduction process, or part of it. Thus, the content should be produced, transmitted and/or reproduced by some sort of related computerized or networked environment. Whether you receive a message at home to your desktop, in your car to your cell phone, or at a café to your wirelessly connected palm device, either occurrences can be defined as e-media.

Moreover, e-media must have a certain level of interaction. Such interaction might be a flash animation on a web page or more simply by navigating through a forum or a DVD menu. The idea is to give the end user the capability of being part of the reality construction process, and not just in the decoding process. Such is the idea of the Weblogs, or blogs, that allow the user to navigate through several entries with a subject in common from different sources and in some of those, provide feedback or join a discussion. It helps the user "sift out the most interesting material from the thousands of magazines,

newsletters, and websites available” (“What is a Weblog?”). Since September 11, Weblogs, and more so warblogs with the current war in Iraq, have been growing in popularity. Mark Dery mentions that "we are really seeing the rise of the warblog as a corrective to the biases and errors of mainstream media and also as a platform for alternative voices that are being muzzled or not offered exposure in the mainstream" (qtd. in Kapadia) thus giving the users more liberty in constructing the meaning, far more close to reality than the one portrayed in mass media.

Customization of e-media, such as changing the language in a DVD, or selecting what types of news should appear on your personalized news page (e.g. MyYahoo!, MyMSN, etc.), is a basic characteristic allowed by some technological configurations, but not a vital characteristic as interaction. Most of the technical configurations allow users to change the size of the font, language, colors, layout of information, amongst other things, in order to make the user feel the content somewhat personalized. Even in some websites the ads are accommodated to the users' characteristics.

Some laws regulate e-media as well. Although there are not many laws written specifically for the Internet, Lorimer and Gasher report that “in June 1999, the CRTC decided it was unnecessary to regulate the Internet, in part because other Canadian laws, such as anti-pornography and anti-hate laws, were already in place and could be applied”(36). Also copyright laws may be applied on internet and subsequently on e-media. Besides having legal regulations, the e-media has some other understandings, such as

“netiquette”. “Netiquette refers to the generally accepted rules of behavior for using the Internet. By following netiquette guidelines, users help to make the Internet a civil place to communicate and share ideas.” (“Netiquette is...”).

E-media, just as mass media, allows producers to deliver its created meaning or reality construct. At the same time, e-media producers may transfer a message without being altered by business, legal and audience influences, like in public media. The influence of owners and media professionals apply to that content specific to their property and participation. Take, for example, a news website, like that of a newspaper, and a normal email. These two represent two different sides of the same media. The news website follows a formal structured process through several filters: business influences like those from advertisers may bias the article; the owner of the news website may have influence in which subjects to include or not; the editor may further bias the content by selecting which articles go in or which ones are left out from the publication. On the other hand, in an email, the sender’s words and structure do not get influenced by other parties, but it is his own influence that shapes the message, which is received and decoded in a different way than the website by the receiver.

E-media allows everyone to be a producer of content. Both technological means and the knowledge to build it are required. This can also be demonstrated with mass media and public media: to see a television program the receiver needs a television set, and a person needs to know how to write in order to write a letter. Most of the time, the production cost

for e-media is not as expensive as the one needed to produce content for mass media. It is less expensive to create a website than it is to publish a book, or a magazine. Whether you are sending an email, participating in a discussion, or writing an article for a webzine, you are producing content for e-media.

The structures of private ownership, public ownership and no ownership coexist in e-media. Private ownership is observed by the production of DVDs and by “official” websites. Public ownership may be exemplified by governmental websites, and the concept of no ownership by the several personal WebPages found in the Internet. The lack of ownership of the Internet has good consequences, when considering that the independent and alternative media’s growth was made possible thanks to the Internet. Santisteban proves this when stating “Chicano and Latino media producers, some out of necessity and others by choice, are taking this general Internet use a step further. For them, the Internet’s electronic transmission capabilities and low operation costs have not only created an important new tool for video production and distribution but also provided an inexpensive new means of advertising and even exhibiting their videos and films on an international market” (113). However it also carries a negative side, such as the production and distribution of child pornography, unreliable information, and the vulnerability to hackers. There is nothing or no one that can stop a certain point of view or piece of information from being delivered via the Internet.

Society is evolving, and so do the ways we communicate, which has resulted in the need to redefine our classifications to accommodate such change. The new classification of media, e-media, embraces the concept of the Internet in its entirety, as well as other computerized mediums such as DVDs, PDAs and cell phones. The new classification of e-media covers the basic features that are now present in technology and possibly the new developments to come.

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