

New media? Why social media is just like television

December 10 2012, by Dr Andy Ruddock

Over the last seven days, social media journalists did an admirable job of documenting what may go down as a historic week in media. Covering the conflict between Instagram and Twitter, Matt Buchanan adroitly observed the former's decision to make it harder for users to share their pictures on the latter dramatised the essential untruth of social media.

Instagram, [Twitter](#), [Google](#) and Facebook all claim they want to get the world sharing, but their [business practices](#) prove that they don't. In fact, Instagram and [Twitter](#) users had discovered that these operations don't want to share sharing. They want to keep attention, and the revenue it attracts, in the same place.

Buchanan thinks that as users switch between platforms, so online identities become fragmented, unsatisfying things. How can we use [social media](#) to come together with others when we can't even use them to come together with ourselves?

Meanwhile, things were no rosier over on Facebook. *The Age's* Alexei Oreskovic noted how The Social Network was stripping users of the right to vote on governance issues, while enhancing its power to build detailed user profiles through its integration with Instagram. In other words, the sharing experience was working rather better for social media businesses than it was for its users. Moreover, Facebook was becoming less and less coy about its status as a publicly traded company. No more neat little dorm project gone large

Strangely, Facebookers don't seem bothered. James Manning, writing in the *The Age*, gloomily explained why the vote was a sham, as Facebook was seeking to extinguish a right that didn't practically exist. According to company rules, referenda only count when at least 30 per cent of all users exercise their right. To date, no Facebook poll has ever come close.

Friday brought yet more news that explained why users are offering so little resistance to a potentially mind-boggling [intrusion](#) into our privacy. An ACMA report found a massive increase in Australian Internet downloads from the previous year. This was driven by users who spent 82 hours a month online. For the most part, this time involved doing things that people did long before the Internet: paying bills, watching the TV and listening to the radio. Perhaps people aren't as concerned about creeping online governance as they might be because that governance has already crept pretty far.

The ACMA report suggests we might find explanations for public apathy toward online privacy by looking to media history. So let's think a little more about television.

In the 1960s, a Hungarian war-hero, Nazi hunter turned media scholar called George Gerbner invented Cultivation Analysis. Based on painstaking analysis of television content, and extensive surveys of viewers, Gerbner and his colleagues concluded that television's main effect was to win audiences' consent for a major shift in cultural life; the outsourcing of storytelling to business interests.

Societies had always told tales, but with television, there was but one motivation for them; keeping audience attention, for profit. To do this, television traded in standardised stories that reinforced pretty vicious prejudices. On TV violence, for example, Gerbner noted that middle class men were the least likely to be the victims in television dramas, and for heavy viewers this reinforced the perception that it's a

man's world.

The idea that television has a politically pacifying effect, overall, has continued in recent studies. One of the things that contemporary cultivation analysts have discovered is that the more time people spend with corporate media, the less bothered they are by the monopolisation of public attention, and all of the social effects that might bring. For people who watch a lot of television, that's just how things are.

So if, in Australia, they're now watching online, perhaps the fatalistic sensibilities that affect television audiences have transferred over to social media.

This possibility certainly set alarm bells ringing last week. Scoffing at the Leveson Inquiry, John Pilger reckoned the hacking scandal as small beer in comparison to new, far reaching state powers to reach into the lives of ordinary citizens; this thanks to previously unimaginable data gathering and aggregating functions facilitated by social media.

Although Pilger's concerns are directed at the state, it may well be social media businesses, with all their rhetoric of sharing and fun, that are the key drivers in winning public consent for such unprecedented surveillance.

Media scholars have written on how television and social media have collaborated to make personal disclosure fun, and common sense. Social media, like television before, are working hard to convince the public that commercial imperatives and public culture should work in tandem. Perhaps, then, last week was just another rerun.

More information: www.theage.com.au/technology/t...-20121206-2ax3g.html

Provided by Monash University

Citation: New media? Why social media is just like television (2012, December 10) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-12-media-social-television.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.