

The Cultures of New Media (DGM 715)

Prepared by

Dr. Mohamed Owies

Lecture No.1



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First Lecture

The Cultures of New Media



First Lecture

The content of Lecture 1

The first lecture sheds light on a number of important topics, including the following:

1. Digital Society
2. Media Everywhere
3. Zeroes and Ones and coding of content
4. Time and Space factors in the media environment
5. Digital tools and platforms
6. The Internet
7. Media as Environments, Environments as Media
8. User-Generated Content
9. Social Media Sites



- Process of evolution derived from the information society through the intensive use of technologies and digital media where the internet positions itself as the information tool on levels of creation publishing, distribution, sharing, and participation.
- A digital society in which everything runs on digital technology where paperless and electronic means are the norm.



- Different tools and platforms that we use to get or spread information, and communicate, enable and limit what we can do in their own specific ways. The medium used will alter our ways of seeing, speaking, and acting. Think about the difference between learning about current events from the website of a big media corporation and from friends on Facebook or Twitter.
- Today, we live in a digital society in the sense that we are in an era where our lives, our relationships, our culture, and our sociality are digitised, digitalised, and affected throughout by digital processes.



- From the outset, the digital has to do with mathematics. Being digital, then, means simply using numbers — digits — rather than analogous objects to convey information.
- In computing, input values are converted to binary numbers, 0 and 1, instead of using all numbers ranging from zero to nine.
- The binary system was invented by philosopher and mathematician **Gottfried Leibniz** in the 1600s. He used this system for coding, computing, and controlling information when experimenting with ideas for machines.
- This is how the computers that we have today, in anything from smartphones and laptops to refrigerators and drones, work too
- **Technologically speaking, this binary system forms the basis for everything we do that is digital.**



- Applications, such as text, sound, graphics, and images became digitally encodable. Today, computers can store and transmit data, which changes how we deal with anything from our family photos and recipes to government documents or business plans.
- We have also learnt that computers can manage communication networks, and this has transformed how we form friendships, and how we connect and stay in touch with people, sometimes across large geographical distances.
- Furthermore, computers can process text, images, and sound, which has changed the way in which writers write, musicians play, and painters paint. Spaceships and airplanes are flown by computers, and digital devices are increasingly entangled in our everyday lives, in the form of laptops, tablets, smartphones, and things like robot vacuum cleaners.



Digitalisation of ourselves and sociality continually moves ever closer with wearable devices.

Still, at the heart of every computer lie circuits that contribute to all of these social and cultural transformations, through the breaking down of operations into mathematical equations.

When we speak of today's society as being digital, we don't very often mean to say that it just draws upon binary numerical operations. What we do tend to mean is that it has been transformed in a number of quite drastic ways, following the development of the early 'computing' machines into smart device.



- Another often emphasised feature of digital society is that it compresses time and space and makes them less important. For example, when we send texts, chats, or emails to each other, there is no need for us to be in the same place to be able to communicate. The exchange need not be instantaneous either, as we can respond to digital messages whenever it suits us.
- it is not that important really whether one should label our present-day society 'post-industrial', 'post-Fordist', 'post-modern', or as an 'information society', 'network society' or a 'control society'.



- There are many ways of collectively naming the interactive activities and environments that people engage in online. You will see that I write of the environments as sometimes ‘internet and social media’, sometimes ‘digital media’ or ‘digitally networked media’, and sometimes as ‘digital tools and platforms’.



- The things such as computers, smartphones and tablets, and to services such as email, texting, Skype, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, blogs, forums, and so on. With these digital tools and platforms, people do things among and between each other.



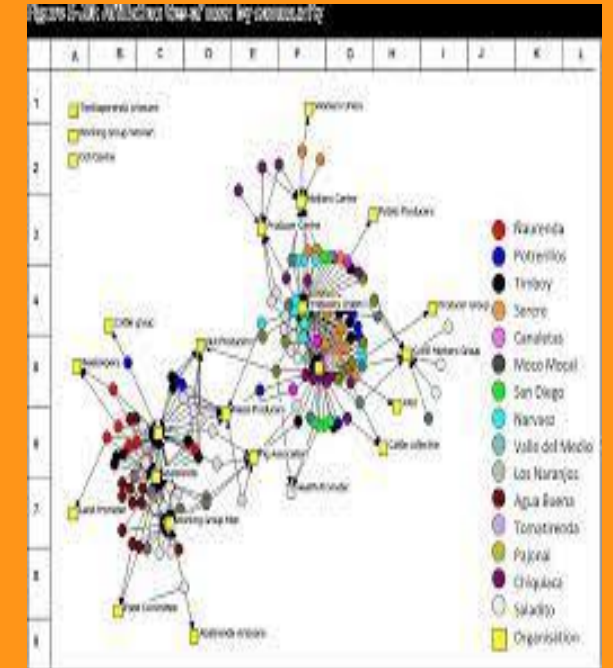
- Before moving on to a more specific discussion of what digital media might mean, we must focus first on one of the key inventions of digital society — namely, the internet.
- This global network of computers, which enables and structures an unmeasurable amount of social activity around the world, feels today as if it was always there. But in fact, it only became widely available in the mid-1990s, through the invention of a protocol for something called the World Wide Web.



- The strategy was to establish a **computer network** that did not rely on **centralised command**, and thus was not **vulnerable** to attacks targeting central hubs (Galloway 2004). Baran's network was based on the technology of packet-switching, through which messages are distributed in small fragments to be reassembled at the receiving end.
- The system was finally realised at the end of the 1960s through funding from the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), President Eisenhower's response to the Soviet Sputnik launch. The agency's ARPANET, the first computer network based on packet-switching, **was used by the military and by academics to transfer and exchange information.**



Castells (2002: 24–25) describes how the Network Working Group, which was doing most ARPANET design in the late 1960s, consisted mainly of graduate students who had studied in the same secondary school in Southern California, later to become students of Leonard Kleinrock at California University.



The young ARPANET developers, and the **student culture** of which they were part – as well as the wider context of late 1960s counterculture – **had a great impact on how the global internet came to emerge**. Castells (2002) writes that **the birth of the internet happened at the rather unlikely intersection of science, military interests, and libertarian culture**. It is **a common misinterpretation** that the internet was created solely as a military command-and-control mechanism, when it was **in fact co-opted already from the start by academics (and others)**.



E-mail, which was initially called **network mail**, was introduced in 1972, and the term internet **itself appeared in 1974** as an **abbreviation for 'internetworking'**. Control of the network was transferred from the Department of Defense to the National Science Foundation by the end of the 1980s, and then to **commercial telecommunications interests** in 1995.



Since then tools using the **internet infrastructure** — such as the web, social media, and mobile apps — have become a crucial part of how people today obtain information, communicate, and interact. This digital and cultural ecosystem provides us with a language for relating to each other and the world around us. In that sense, **the internet is a medium**.



From the perspective of media ecology, the internet — as an **intrinsic part of digital society** — is a medium because it is an environment. And conversely, it is an environment because it is a **medium**.



First Lecture

Media as Environments, Environments as Media

Media ecologists such as McLuhan (1964) and media theorist Neil Postman (1970) have maintained that media must be defined as something more wide-ranging than the traditional informational devices, such as radio, television, newspaper, movies, sound records, computers, and so on.



Instead, they argued, a medium is any symbolic structure, or social environment, that in some way, and under certain circumstances, defines human interaction and the production of culture.



First Lecture

Media as Environments, Environments as Media

From this perspective, a newspaper is a medium because it provides us with a certain way of relating to the world — through print text, still images, and certain journalistic genres and conventions. It also establishes limits, as a conventional old school newspaper does not allow for things like moving images, sounds, and online reader comments.



First Lecture

Media as Environments, Environments as Media

In a similar way, from a media **ecology perspective**, coffee houses and classrooms are also **media**, for the same reasons: they offer certain ways of relating to the world, while at the same time establishing boundaries for what can be said, done, expressed, learnt, or achieved. **Sociologically speaking, this means that media, like the internet, are social structures.**

From the perspective of media ecology, media — such as the internet and platforms — are such environments: symbolic structures within which we are situated and through which we engage.



This embeddedness happens on two levels.

First, there is the sensorial level, where things like a Facebook page, a Twitter profile, or an Instagram feed each employ our senses in different ways, much like reading is visual, radio is auditory, and video games are visual and auditory, as well as tactile. In a way, the reality we sense is constructed or reconstructed through the medium at hand.



Famously, McLuhan (1964: 35) defined media as **'extensions'** of our senses that decide how people experience and become aware of the world around them. This also relates to what McLuhan meant when he, even more famously, declared that **'the medium is the message'**. Switching from one medium to another reconfigures our senses and alters the ways in which we understand and reconstruct the world around us.



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Media as Environments, Environments as Media

Second, there is the symbolic level, at which every medium is constituted by a certain systematic set of rules and codes in the form of **vocabulary, grammar,** and other **conventions.** such as: posting an Instagram photo require knowledge of conventions such as using hashtags and applying filters.

Media ecologists talk of some major changes throughout history and how these introduced crucial social transformations. The shift from a culture of talking to a culture of writing meant that the **elders'** role as experts and unique sources of knowledge diminished.



The introduction of the **printing press** meant a further democratisation of information, and the arrival of electronic media contributed even more to balancing the **temporal**, **spatial**, and **symbolic** constraints for who could speak, where and when, and to whom.



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Media as Environments, Environments as Media

Today, we live in a world with a growing number of co-existing media, which means that we relate not to one, but to a combination of several environments. It is not sensible to conceive the internet as part writing, part still image, part moving image, part sound, part computer, part telephone, part television, and so on. Rather, it must be approached as a whole, and then as a whole that might be more than the sum of its parts.



While the content of radio, television, or the internet might be a football game or a political debate, the message — in McLuhan's terms — of each of these media is not that. The message is instead equal to the social changes that a medium generates.



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Media as Environments, Environments as Media

He wrote (McLuhan 1964: 20) that ‘the “message” of any medium or technology is the change of **scale** or **pace** or **pattern** that it introduces into human affairs’. He also argued that the content of a medium is always another medium: the content of television might be the medium of a theatrical play, the medium of football, and so on.



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Media as Environments, Environments as Media

He wanted to make the point that by just studying the content, we risk becoming entangled in this **spiral of media** within media within media.

It was therefore better, he thought, to instead focus on understanding media in terms of the **ways in which they transform the social.**



In media studies during the last few decades, however, there has been increased talk **about users being active**. They have been shown to be just as competent as **the creators of content**. Their expertise is sometimes of a different kind, and comes into expression in how they make use of **media content in smart and unexpected ways**.



But more and more often they also create entirely new things by and for themselves. Because of this, words like producer or participant have become more popular than 'user' in some contexts.

User-generated content (UGC) is increasingly common in the online economy, often appearing in forms of **blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures, videos, and social networks.**



In the case of news media, the use of websites to integrate user content has intensified. For example, the **Wall Street Journal (WSJ)**, in its online version, offers readers the opportunity to add content under the section titled **“Journal Community**.

In addition, using this platform, news readers can make comments or ask questions about stories published by WSJ journalists.

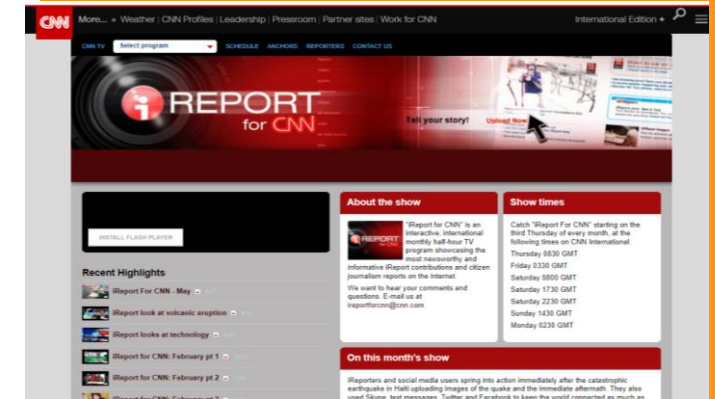


First Lecture

User- Generated Content

Similarly, CNN on its website has been broadcasting news videos called I-Reports that are submitted by its audience. For these news companies, the impact of UGC on **profitability** is unknown, as it can be a **substitute** for professionally prepared content.

I am the witness (أنا الشاهد) am the witness" is a weekly program that adopts the style of citizen journalism.

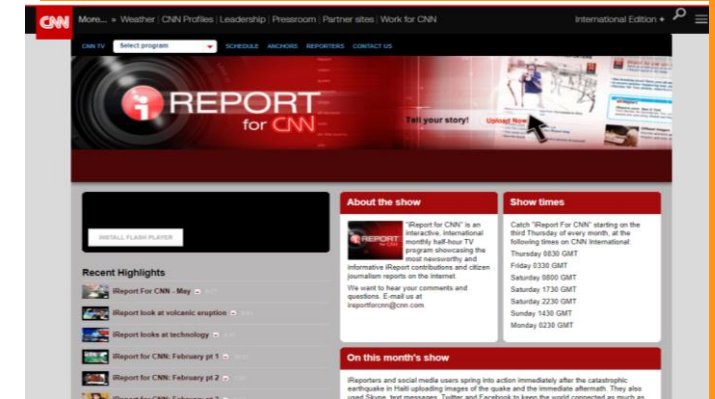


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User- Generated Content

The program presents stories and testimonies narrated by citizens from all over the world, especially from the Arab world, in audio and video, in which they deal with their daily lives or issues related to their societies and countries.

If you have personal experience, photos or videos that you want to submit for the program, please use the form at the bottom of the page or write to us at the following email address



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User- Generated Content

observers Program برنامج مراقبون

It deals with the events through direct testimonies of people who witnessed the event, and uses photos, videos and recordings sent by amateur observers and verified by France 24 journalists.

Al-Arabiya has officially launched the “I see” news service, a special application through which activists and the public in general can send photos, videos and texts, which are shown - according to their importance - on **Al-Arabiya** and **Al-Hadath** channels.

The application includes 9 sections, through which the user can participate by publishing what he sees around him, wherever he is in the world, and these sections are: Politics, Sports, Society, Style, Food, Movies, Technology, Comedy, Music.



Digital Tools and Platforms for Being Social

web 1

the starting to use the **web** in the 1990s will recall the experience of quite static forms of content, and of a relative lack of two-way communication. A few years into the 2000s however, there was increasing talk of a transition from an early form of web — web 1.0 — to something that was called web 2.0.

The latter -web 2- is a concept with several dimensions.

First, it was a buzzword used in business lingo and where people uploaded videos to YouTube, 'liked' stuff on Facebook, and blogged about their favourite brands .

Second, it referred to certain technological solutions and innovations — blogging platforms, RSS feeds, wikis, social network sites — that encouraged participation, networking, and creativity among peers.

Third — and most importantly from a sociological perspective — it is related to a certain frame of mind and action which is about different forms of making and connecting (Gauntlett 2011).

The web 2.0 was developed in order to realise the interactive and collaborative potentials of the internet in better ways than web 1.0. With innovations like blogs, social-networking sites, wikis, tagging, and sharing, 2.0 emphasises social interaction, creativity, and the production of knowledge among peers. It also enables the **co-creation and constant editing** by multiple users of multimodal content, that is, content which mixes several modalities (written text, photographic images, videos, sounds, etc.).

When we speak of online platforms for such types of interaction, networking, and creativity today — Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube, Instagram, etc. — we tend to call **them social media**. But this does not mean that people didn't socialise, create, and share things through media before.

There are also often functions for reacting to, or interacting with, content by liking it, disliking it, sharing it, commenting on it, responding to it, and sometimes editing or remixing it.

For Gauntlett, YouTube is a prime example of a digital creative platform because of three things:

It is a framework for participation. The wide range of types of video that are uploaded by people.

The platform is **content-agnostic**, which means that it neither knows nor cares about all of the uploads, experimentations, and innovations that its users might be doing. YouTube as such does not care whether a big news corporation registers an account to post its professionally produced features, or if an **'ordinary person'** goes on the site to share gaming walkthrough videos.

The platform **has community features** by which users can communicate and connect to promote their own videos, to share knowledge and skills, to entertain or support each other.

Thank You

