Continuous Assessment 1.1:

The Power of Social Media
Critical Reflection

Introduction to Social Media

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Coverpage image depicts a woman's critical reflection (Sanchez 2019)

The Power of Social Media (Activity 1.3)

In 2020, the need for further research into the power that social media platforms wield is indisputable. Due to this, I chose to critically reflect on three examples and consequences that digitisation, and its child, social media, impose upon society. Namely, social media's potential to damage the cognitive processes of its users, direct targeting of the public with both positive and negative communication mediums, as well as the reshaping of traditional news media operational and financial models.

Psychological effects of social media

On December 7, 2017, Australia voted 'Yes' to amend the wording of the 1961 Marriage Act to legalise same sex marriage. Prior to this landmark decision I conducted two interviews, one with a representative from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community, and the other from a Christian-based organisation. My intention was to remove any bias on my part and to show both sides of the argument to our magazine's readership. It took only three hours online within the magazines Facebook page and YouTube channel, for each video to garner over a thousand views, and for an LGBT organised cyber bullying campaign against the magazine to kick-off, which targeted myself, our subscribers and our hosting platforms. I was informed that the campaign would continue until I took down the Christian representative's interview.

In the cyber bullying example above, what I assumed to be a 'normal' journalistic process incorporating free speech on both sides, was interpreted by the LGBT community as a form of hate speech. From my perspective, if I complied with the LGBT group's order I would be giving in to authoritarianism and sacrificing fair reporting practice. My anxiety was high throughout this encounter, I felt bullied and that the LGBT group involved were unfairly forcing my hand utilising the threat of cancel culture. I refused to bend the knee, and over the next few days our five star rating was reduced to a single star due to negative comments. The constant bombardment of insults ceased when both social media platforms censored the Christian-based interview, neither providing any feedback for their decision. When this occurred, I took down the LGBT representatives' interview to provide the only fair and balanced

action at my disposal. In 2020, the psychological effects from this incident still endure. A social media usage study conducted by Asibong et al. (2020, p. 118) determined that out of the 418 university students surveyed almost a third were psychologically distressed due to social media usage. This emotion manifesting in a decrease in academic performance, self-isolation, self-doubt, melancholy, and irritability (Batool, Yousaf & Batool 2017, p. 134; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson 2011, pp. 801-802). Since this time, I have steered clear of all LGBT related interviews and events. From the LGBT groups perspective, a strong unwavering message won the day and confirmed that 'cancel culture' works; conversely, I now associate the LGBT movement with oppression.

Beneficial and detrimental communication on social media platforms

Social media has proven to be an effective and economic means of engaging with family members, friends, the community, and consumers. From a business perspective, social media allows an organisation to create a persona online that has maximum reach, and which can directly target its consumers for marketing and data collection purposes. Increasingly, this medium is being abused and used as a tool to spread propaganda.

During the 2011 Queensland floods I was separated from my home for a five day period; flood level information was circulated on a Facebook community page by the public, as well as time-critical State Emergency Services (SES) information, in real-time (Bird, Ling & Haynes 2012). Looking back, I found the constant stream of data on social media from the SES calming and reassuring, and the frequently posted flood level photographs enabled me to plan my return home. I now see that my ability to communicate with loved ones, through various Facebook postings, decreased my anxiety and the feeling of being overwhelmed by this major event.

Traditional media redesign through digitisation and social media

Social media has had, in my opinion, its greatest financial impact upon traditional news media sources. The digitisation operational model for the gathering and dissemination of news has completely changed how the journalism industry operates. Advertising money kept traditional media afloat, however it has now moved to various virtual platforms, which has resulted in

the destruction of the traditional media financial model (Fisher 2018, p. 21). This collapse has led to the breakdown of the newsroom, and the replacement of journalists with less qualified, opinion-based writers, who place more emphasis on writing attention-seeking, monetary-producing news items, that is, clickbait, over factual news articles (Oaten 2017).

The day following the London Bridge terrorist attack, in June 2017, is when I had my 'light bulb' moment and turned away from unethical journalism (Fisher 2018, p. 19). Mark Antro, a London resident, witnessed and recorded a CNN reporter staging members from the London Fatwa Council at a floral tribute to the attack's victims (Hodge 2017). The manipulation of the news content was obvious, however, most mainstream news outlets and fact checking services dismissed the footage as fake news. I later found online an interview (Robertson 2017), with Mark Antro; his description of what occurred prior to filming revealed the truth and news source collaboration.

In that moment, I moved from being an impartial viewer of mainstream traditional news sources, to an interactive online searcher of news truth. I realised that I was no longer able to support a system that only provides the façade of truth in-line with an idealistic or monetary-based agenda (Chung & Nah 2013, p. 271). This decision made me an exception amongst my peers.

In hindsight, I realise with great unease that further investigation should have occurred in regard to the extent of CNN's situational control. If other mainstream news outlets had questioned CNN on their ethics then perhaps the current culture of news 'opinion' and not news 'fact', would not be our current 'normal'.

Conclusion

This paper's focus is on the consequences associated with social media power, and how it is imposed upon society. In particular, the reshaping of traditional media's operational and financial models, positive and negative social media communication, and the potential of psychological damage to its users; and how I have used these theories to reflect upon past events that challenged my concept of what I thought of as 'normal'. My understanding of these events is strengthened by the fact that social media's ultimate power lies in its creation of a global communications network that has manifested a more inquisitive community, who I believe can identify and combat the negatives highlighted within this paper.

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