

The Blessings of Electronic Media's Age of Hysteria

As I awake to my alarm clock's screams, one drifting hand snakes out from the warmth of my covers into the crisp morning darkness, finding a button and pressing it. A green light bursts into my face as my computer wheezes for breath, coming to life. I sit up and reach for my cute, wafer-thin phone. I check my text messages. Two. One I discard. (How did they get my number?) The other message makes me laugh and I forward it to my sister. My computer now started, I slide into my chair, squinting at my Facebook page onscreen. Friends have piled my inbox with forwards ranging from homemade videos of piano-playing cats to snippets of President Obama's latest speech. I watch a few of the feeds until hunger herds me to the kitchen. I stare down the news anchors of CNN on the television as I munch my cereal. The emails of viewers are being read, stating their opinions on the new Health Care Bill. Twenty minutes later I'm dashing to my car, and as the engine begins to roar the car radio rants about the latest politics. I am a citizen of "the information nation of hysteria"—a seemingly apt title for America, provided by popular, modern rock band Greenday—and as a citizen my senses are constantly besieged by broadcasts and emailed messages. America is under the sway of electronic media from cell phones to the television, the internet, and the radio; the main side-effect is often a nation-wide sense of confusion as information, much of it biased, pours through our eyes and ears where it conflicts within our brains. Electronic media and the stress it brings can make the technology seem like the final curse preceding apocalypse. Nevertheless, electronic media is not a stressor many in our nation seek to escape. This is because despite the bias of electronic media, the technology's

ability to grant all people a voice and its instantaneous accessibility make it a valuable tool for providing citizens with reliable information about important issues.

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Electronic media's bias can make the information it provides unreliable. Such prejudice is displayed through any of the innumerable blogs and editorials on the internet, as well as the new, opinionated reporting style on the television and the radio. Bloggers, in many ways the plague of the internet, often shove half-formed ideas into hastily assembled articles and declare their exaggerations as fact. This is not unusual human behavior. When discussing politics with comrades face-to-face, an individual will conduct herself in a similar manner, attempting to convince her friends that her favored candidate habitually saves pandas, while the candidate she disfavors plots world take-over with Martians. Any reasonable citizen is apt to doubt such claims when they come from the mouth of a friend who—not being a politician or a possessor of the key to Area 51—frankly has no idea what she is talking about. However, as such opinionated individuals gain access to the internet and are able to publish their creative insights online, internet users who encounter their words are more often persuaded by them, taken with the foolish but inevitable subconscious philosophy that “if it is in writing it must be true.” Television and the radio, like the internet, have also begun to cater to this overly-opinionated, fact-distorting force that is sweeping electronic media. Most of today's anchorwomen and men are apt to exaggerate in order to produce shock and outrage; after all, as the old adage says, bad news sells. Unfortunately, due to this, the disappearance of bias in electronic media, whether online, on the radio, or on television, is unlikely to occur any time soon.

Yet, despite the taint of bias, electronic media is to be praised as it democratically grants everyone in the world a voice. Often serving as a universal think tank, the internet has connected the thoughts and theories of scientists and other free thinkers spanning the globe. Blogs—while not a source of reliable information—allow individuals from all walks of life to express their opinions—political or otherwise—to the world. These diverse voices, if not for the internet, would otherwise remain silent. Radio talk shows also feature the verbal editorials of our nation’s spokespeople, and FM stations broadcast popular music inspired by the dreams, passions and fears of today’s generation. Television serves, perhaps, as the best barometer for modern society as talk shows like *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* present public opinion versus the broadcast words of politicians—who are admittedly not known for their honesty. While electronic media is dominated by editorial statements, this, perhaps, is a blessing which makes the information the media dispenses all the more reliable and important. Although users of electronic media would do best to learn to distinguish between opinion and fact when employing electronic media, the liberation of citizen’s voices in protest or approval of today’s issues, allowing innumerable viewpoints on the same issue to be revealed, makes today’s citizens more open-minded and politically aware than ever before.

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Finally, the shining attribute of electronic media is its instantaneous accessibility. Cell phones with internet—a common commodity among today’s youth—put the world at your fingertips, and such electronic innovations have made the planet Earth a smaller place. National secrets are now hard to keep; the image of the Chinese man starkly standing before the tanks meant to crush the protesting students—an image that when

published was heralded across air waves and web sites—has b

century. In the past year protests in Iran resulting in police brutality and military action have been captured by cell phone and revealed to the world, and recent demonstrations enacted by the students of Californian universities were recorded by hand phones and promptly posted on YouTube. New, vital information is uploaded onto the internet every second—often from amateur photographers' cell phones—and vital information from those sources is then regurgitated on the nightly news and discussed on the radio. Thus the electronic media of the world unites through the efforts of people everywhere to create a colossus of technology. Thanks to modern electronics' accessibility there is no longer any real barrier between people and the information they seek.

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In conclusion, although bias often distracts from fact, electronic media's ability to democratically grant everyone a voice, and its accessibility, makes it an indispensable tool in providing citizens with vital and valuable information, particularly concerning worldwide events. While electronic media, such as the internet, has taken the firmest hold in free, prosperous nations such as America—where a little over 74% of the population employs it (Miniwatts)—its influence spreads exponentially every year. In fact, there has been a 380.3% increase in internet users globally since the year 2000, amounting to over 1,700,000,000 users worldwide (Miniwatts). Due to the increasingly important role of the internet has in people's lives, the United Nations has even ascertained internet access as a human right! (Samarajiva) Even though adopting electronic media brings its own share of stress and difficulties, as citizens of America realize, the blessings it brings more than compensate for its negative influences.

Word Count: 1,195

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