

Layers of the Information Onion

As food connoisseurs will tell you, the center of the onion is undoubtedly the sweetest and purest part. As each layer moves away from the coveted center, a little of the purity is lost until the skin is reached and nothing flavorful remains. This characteristic of the onion applies to the positive and negative effects electronic media exerts on the accessibility and reliability of important information.

At the center of the Information Onion is the pure, unaffected, unfiltered information. It represents the most direct form of conveying information to citizens - straight from the source to the intended audience. Examples include press conferences, speeches, live interviews, testimonials, anything where a viewer, listener, or reader has direct access to facts without any kind of outside influence or opinion. This is the most reliable form of information because it has not passed through any other layers. What is seen, heard, or read, is exactly what was shown, said, or written. Electronic media plays a big role in delivering information directly from the source to the audience. For example, President Obama's inauguration speech could be seen on television, streamed live over the Internet to home computers, or downloaded to iPhones as YouTube videos. This type of accessibility would be impossible without the aid and widespread use of electronic media.

Inevitably, layers are added around the center of the Information Onion, obscuring the pure information. What are these layers? A news agency adding its spin

or a talk show host injecting his or her comments, anything that injects opinion rather than facts are layers. Each layer distorts and sometimes prevents the true information provided by the primary source from coming through. Each time an author, television show host, or columnist offers their personal view on the matter, accurate information can become lost. The center becomes obscured by opinion after opinion. If a person wishes to see the center, they must work to peel away the layers created by outside influences. Just as layers outnumber the center of the onion, so too does the availability of opinionated information over factual information. Unfortunately for those desiring unfiltered information, electronic media provides an outlet for adding layers. For example, a politician being interviewed about how the new healthcare program works is adding his or her own layer to the Information Onion. Through electronic media, that layer can move quickly around the country.

The next layers on the Information Onion obfuscate the center even further. Whereas layers of opinionated articles or interviews can sometimes be easy to peel away to find the source, the next layers are far more numerous and difficult to get through. The electronic media provides outlets such as online discussion boards that allow people to freely post their own interpretation of information. Unfortunately for the average citizen, interpretation of information is not what is desired. The citizen needs the center of the onion so that they may interpret for themselves. The aforementioned electronic media source enables people anywhere to offer their own opinions, interpretations, and views on information related to important issues. More often than

not, these outlets lead to interpretations of the already opinionated information; layers built upon layers. When this happens, reliable and factual information can be difficult to find. These middle layers are becoming more and more prevalent as people flock to the Internet to give and seek information.

The outer layers constitute the least reliable and accurate information available to citizens. Opinionated, interpreted, and misconstrued, the outer layers can be of questionable credibility. New social networking sites and personal blogs are readily available to anyone with an Internet connection, an opinion, and a desire to be heard. Popular sites such as Facebook allow any person to dispense their biased or uninformed view on crucial issues. While it is true that Facebook is a good way for people to stay connected on a personal level, when used to share information on crucial issues, the link to the center of the Information Onion can become nonexistent.

However, these online sites cannot compare to perhaps the greatest misconstruers of information: texting and its close cousin the Twitter. These devious forms of electronic media represent the outermost layer of the Information Onion, a place where facts are deeply hidden among opinions and a new breed of language. Because texting and twittering provide a quick and effective means of communication, it is also the most popular form of information sharing. Unfortunately, these means of communication suffer from a significant limitation - message length. Often, a complex issue is broken down into a sentence fragment that is not always easily understood.

Worse, text and twitter messages also rely heavily on acronyms (e.g. LOL, OMG, etc.) that might as well be Morse Code to some people. “Btw globl warmng up, idk. l8r” is not only hard to understand, but also includes a questionable reference to global warming. These outer layers of the Information Onion represent the least accurate information available to citizens.

In today’s world, electronic media is a double-edged sword with respect to its ability to convey accurate information to citizens. New technologies have allowed citizens to get right to the source of information. Through recent developments such as video streaming and YouTube, the audience is quickly transported to the the center of the Information Onion. However, electronic media also enables opinions, interpretations, and inaccuracies to add layers around the center, blocking the truth from view. In the end, the citizen must peel away layers of biases to truly discover the information they so desperately need.

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