

Who Wants Health Care When You Can Have Pompoms?

A commercial plane crashes to the ground, cracking in half upon impact. One man named Mike Wilson, unharmed by the abrupt descent, emerges from the flaming wreckage. Does he rush to help those who may have become wounded or disoriented in the accident? Does he run for the hills before the plane explodes? No. He *tweets* about it, sending a short message to all of his followers on Twitter (Siddique).

Despite possessing severely impaired decision-making skills, Wilson is in fact one of millions providing an invaluable service to people throughout the globe. Since the advent of the radio, individuals have become able to share information both quickly and easily across great distances. Several years later came the Internet. Additionally, just a few years after the World Wide Web first came into being, blogging, texting, emailing and myspacing were born. These recent developments have only augmented the already growing trend of information sharing that has taken hold of the general public.

While it is clear that there are many flaws present in the world's current information sharing system, it does have its advantages. Besides the obvious boon of expediency, another useful aspect of all forms of electronic media is that users have the opportunity to comment on issues, important or otherwise. Both television and the Internet offer chances for people to share their opinions on issues that concern them. Through leaving comments or giving interviews, they are able to offer feedback to all that will listen, detailing why or why not they have a certain opinion on an issue. This kind of open communication also gives people with opportunity to make suggestions

about what might be done to alleviate tensions between supporters and opponents of any problem that happens to arise.

Perhaps even more importantly, individuals writing blogs under pseudo names can say what newspapers and magazines in oppressive countries cannot. Many gruesome tales have come to light because it is nearly impossible to censor the Internet and cell phones. The virtual slavery that is occurring amongst construction workers in Dubai is beginning to come to the attention of authorities everywhere because a reporter who exited the country blogged about it shortly after his departure and some of the workers that were being held captive managed to obtain a phone to call their families (Latham).

However, the reliability of some of the information the general public receives must be called into question. Rumors and hearsay abound on the Internet, and many technology fans are all too eager to pass on a juicy piece of gossip, whether it is founded on truth or fallacy. Some of this is simply because people see these rumors as reliable (for who would write them if they weren't?), but it must also be recognized that crazy, outlandish gossip sucks in far more readers and viewers than any piece of news would. For example, which post would the average Internet user be most drawn to, one entitled: Obama Struggles to Promote Health Care Bill, or Obama Has Affair with a College Cheerleader?

Regrettably, more people are drawn to shaking pompoms than nationwide medical care. This illuminates the most tragic flaw present in all forms of electronic media: gossip and gore get more face time than crucial news stories.

Hours after Michael Jackson died, his name began to surface in CNN's top articles. In fact, articles about his death were #1 Most Viewed in *seven* sections- U.S., World, Politics, Entertainment, Health, Living, and Opinion (still trying to figure out how Michael Jackson relates to politics? Don't worry, you're not alone) ("Michael"). Though he deserves to be honored as the King of Pop, the fact of the matter is that readers are far too concerned with the uproar that followed his expiration. Earlier that same week, articles had begun trickling in that elections in Iran had been rigged. Unfortunately, this important news item was carried away in the deluge of Michael Jackson articles. Not until several weeks later did it once again merit the attention of reporters and their readers.

The tendency for readers to either read or comment on inconsequential things has caught the eye of researchers, who are beginning to confirm what the average blogger, texting freak, or out of control Twitter abuser already knows: that most electronic commentary serves little or no purpose for those that use it.

An independent research firm called Pear Analytics decided to find out just how common different forms of tweets (messages posted using Twitter) were. They divided them into six groups based on content: News, Spam, Self-Promotion, Pointless Babble,

Conversational, and Pass-Along Value. After spending two weeks analyzing thousands of tweets, they discovered that Pointless Babble was unequivocally the number one focus of Twitter users, with over 40 percent of tweets being centered around information that is of no consequence to anyone but the writers themselves (Ryan).

All in all, researchers concluded that over 85 percent of comments written through Twitter are gossip, opinion, and, to make good use of an extremely appropriate phrase, “Pointless Babble.” It is also worth noting that the category with the smallest percentage of tweets was News, which managed to accumulate a measly 3.6 percent of the messages studied (Ryan).

Though many wish to claim that this near indifference to important pieces of news is confined to amateur web locations, the fact of the matter is that the tastes of the masses determine what people will write about. All people. No one is willing to write an article that will not capture readers' or viewers' attention.

Despite its shortcomings, various forms of electronic media have thus far proved to be a wealth of information for those who are truly committed to finding it. The problems mentioned above are not the result of electronics, but rather are a reflection of the attitude of utter indifference that media users appear to have when it comes to issues that are part of a bigger picture. Before anything is fixed, people first have to come to the realization that the way in which they approach electronic media must be altered. Until

this happens, television, computers, and radio will remain breeding grounds for gossip and gore.

Word count: 1098

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