Internet, Social Media, and Technology

Inquire: Communicating Online

Overview

As the Internet grows and we rely on it more and more, it's important to learn about how we use it to communicate. Technology has made communication easier and more expansive with every great breakthrough, and the Internet is no exception to this rule. This lesson will look at how technology improves communication, what ethical obligations new technologies bring, what mediated communication and mass communication are, and how to identify fake news.

Big Question: Where do you seek out information about current events and news updates?

Watch: Using the Internet to Communicate

The Internet makes it easier to send messages to thousands of people than it has ever been. Being able to send a message — the same message — to so many people without having to physically be there is one of the biggest benefits of online mass communication. Forms of mass communication have steadily evolved over time. As new technologies develop, the fundamental purpose of mass communication remains the same: a reliable way to spread a uniform message to a large audience. The Internet has already changed the way we talk to one another, and that isn’t slowing down any time soon.

There are many tools used to send mediated, or technology assisted, messages through mass communication: social media, emails, television, newspapers, and movies, to name a few. These forms of mass communication all have a home on the Internet, where you can access any number of messages instantly. These forms of mediated mass communication have become increasingly important in today’s society. Think of the uses for social media or a cell phone more generally. Think about the last time you couldn’t just Google something or get the latest news updates within a few moments of needing them. This interconnectivity allows for mass communication to take on a new level of importance in our daily lives like it never has before. With this reliance comes the danger of over-reliance or manipulation. American culture is currently wrestling with this problem in our political discourse. Knowing what mass media is, how it affects us, and how to identify its influence are some of the most important skills we can develop in this age of increased mass communication.

What uses of mass communication do you have in your life? Has it changed how you live your life in any way? As mass communication becomes more prevalent, these questions become more and more important. What are the negative aspects of mass communication? How do we address them?

These questions will be addressed in this lesson, and their answers will be exceptionally important to society at large as mass communication gains prominence in our daily lives.
Read: Mass and Mediated Communication

Overview

New technology has always improved the way we communicate. Whether it is written language, the typewriter, or the radio, as we get more advanced, communication does too. This lesson will look at how technology improves communication, what ethical obligations new technologies bring, what mediated communication is, and what mass communication is.

What Impact Does Technology Have on Communication?

Communication has rapidly developed alongside technology. As we move into the Internet age, those developments are no different. There are several ways recent technology has changed the way we send and receive messages. First refers to the sheer number of messages we now exchange. When you turn to your phone, you are able to access a hypothetically infinite amount of messages at any given time. What happens when you Google a question? Advances in technology allow you to access hundreds of thousands of messages relating to your question — something that even 20 years ago was impossible.

The second impact is how quickly we are able to get ahold of messages. 24-hour news cycles give us news minute by minute — a perfect example of how quickly messages spread. Viral videos show this as well. Within minutes, millions of people can see a message. The ability to make these large numbers of messages more accurate is also a bonus, thanks to technology. News sources can fact-check political debates in real time, where before the Internet, it might have taken days to offer the same information. Even outside the world of politics, the Internet presents the opportunity to find accurate information and correct mistakes faster when they happen.

The final impact is that of availability. Information used to be limited based on what books you were able to access, what shows you were able to watch, or what programs you were able to listen to. Now, all of that information is archived and able to be accessed at any time from almost anywhere.

Ethical Obligations of Online Communication

With this large amount of information available online, there are ethical obligations that come with Internet communication. First, as always, be honest. Because the Internet offers a host of ways to fact check, you should always strive to be honest in the information you post. Rather than posting something you heard one time, research it. Make sure it is accurate before you share it with the world.

In the same vein, your second obligation is to fact check yourself and others. Don’t be obnoxious about this one, but if you notice that you or someone else made a mistake, try to fix it. Offer a source to show how the information is incorrect. However, don’t be rude when doing so.

Your third obligation is to recognize there is a person on the other side of the screen. Be polite. Don’t say mean or hurtful things just because you are anonymous. More often than not, you aren’t really anonymous, but even if you are, don’t contribute to negative or mean conversations. Rise above, and use this power of online communication for good, not evil.
What is Mediated Communication?

Mediated communication is any communication that happens with the use of technology. Mediated communication relies on technological advancements to reach new, diverse audiences. This form of communication is oftentimes conflated with mass communication, and they are similar. Mediated communication, however, focuses much more on the technology rather than the size. Mediated communication means Facebook messaging someone 300 miles away and instantly getting a reply. A tweet is also mediated communication, but it happens to be mass communication as well. An easy way to differentiate mediated communication from other forms of communication is by figuring out how the message is getting to the receiver. If the message relies on technology to travel, it is mediated. That doesn't mean it can't be other kinds of communication as well. Mediated communication is a new way of sending messages thanks to the rise of technology, but it isn't exclusive from other forms of communicating. As more and more messaging and communication apps are developed, this becomes even more true. Now, instead of sending text across long distances, you can send videos and sound clips as well.

What is Mass Communication?

Communication is often thought of as one-on-one conversation, but with the rise of a 24-hour news cycle, social media, and cell phones, mass communication is increasingly important to understand. Mass communication is the large-scale sending of a message, often through media or technology, to a large number of receivers. This means that a speaker with a megaphone reaching 100 people in a stadium is mass communication — the same as a celebrity tweeting morning thoughts. The thing that sets mass communication apart from other forms of communication is that it is intended for a large number of receivers, rather than one person, two people, or a small group. Because these messages are intended for a wider audience, the considerations of what to say and how to say it to effectively reach as many receivers as possible are much different than one-on-one communication.

Often, mass communication is mediated through some sort of channel called media. Media, the plural form of medium, is simply the channel used to share a message. A mediated medium is any channel assisted by technology to share a message. A teacher's voice is a medium, and a tweet is a medium, but the tweet is a mediated message, while the voice — on its own — is not. Mass communication takes advantage of mediated channels of communication to reach wide audiences. This often leads mass communication to be conflated with the media, or with mediated communication, but there is a difference.

Other uses of mass communication include entertainment such as movies, television shows, or stand-up routines; sensationalization, putting forward the most captivating information to try to excite receivers; and mobilization, organizing large groups of people during times of crisis or need.

Reflect Poll: Your Internet Usage

How long are you online in a day?

- 0-3 hours
- 4-6 hours
- 7-9 hours
- 10+ hours
Expand: Spotting Fake News

Overview

One of the most problematic uses of mass communication is the spreading of fake news. In this section, we will discuss ways to be aware of what is or is not fake news in an ever-growing world of mass communication. Knowing how to tell what is real and what isn't takes away one of the biggest dangers of mass communication and turns a valuable tool into something even greater.

How to Spot the Fake

Five easy steps can help you identify fake news from the real stuff: check the source, check the content, check the date, decide if it’s satire, and consult experts.

First up, check the source. Figuring out the source of the information is a great way to tell if it is real. Is it a blog? It might not be too reliable. Is it a news agency? That's a little better. Figuring out who is publishing the article is the best first step to take. As you read more and more, you get a feel for what sources are trustworthy and what sources tend to embellish. Once you know the source, check the author! Who wrote it? Are they qualified to be talking about this subject? Is it someone writing about something that happened on the other side of the country or were they there? These details are helpful in finding out the most truthful account of information.

Second, check the content. Read an article, understand what it is saying, and figure out how it supports its information. Does it have interviews with people that were at an event? Does it have statistics or other forms of data to support what it says? If it is just someone’s opinion, or a statement with no support, it is best to take that information with a grain of salt until you can confirm or deny the contents of the article.

Third, check the date. Information changes! Things change! People make groundbreaking discoveries that change what we know about the world around us. If you find an article, check when it was written. Just because something was true one, five, ten, or 30 years ago does not mean it is still true. Do your best to find the date of the news to know if it’s talking about current events or things in the past.

Fourth, decide if it’s satire. There are a host of funny “news” sites that write articles making fun of current events. The Onion does not report on facts. It is a satirical source, and there are several others like it. Make sure the place you get your news is actually a news site, not a joke site making fun of situations as they happen.

Finally, trust and consult the experts. If you don’t know about something, seek out information from someone who does. There are several fact-checking websites (Snopes, PolitiFact, FactCheck) that pay staffers to prove or disprove claims made in the news. Trust that those people are supporting their arguments well, and see what they conclude about an issue if you can’t tell on your own.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

A video explaining what mass communication is and how it has been developed through time

- Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7bVp3xfCkg
A video explaining specific types of mass communication
  ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBHQZbCvc00

A video explaining issues presented by mass communication, as well as its effects on daily life
  ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Q0FoBuOdR8

Lesson Glossary

mediated communication: any communication that happens with the use of technology
mediated medium: any channel assisted by technology to share a message
sensationalization: putting forward the most captivating information to try to excite receivers
mobilization: organizing large groups of people during times of crisis or need

Check Your Knowledge

1. Mass communication and mediated communication are the same thing.
   a. True
   b. False
2. The Internet has increased access to communication messages.
   a. True
   b. False
3. The Internet has increased the speed of messages.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

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