Traditional Media

Inquire: The Importance of Traditional Media

Overview

Traditional media has evolved over the years. It started with handwritten books used to spread information to those who could afford them, and the advent of the printing press changed that. Then, radio once again revolutionized how people received information. Television changed the game in much the same way. These evolutions have changed the face of traditional media in the modern era. In this lesson, we will define traditional media, show its evolution over time, talk about ethical obligations, and discuss some arguments against the prevalence of the traditional media.

Big Question: How important is the traditional media in spreading information to society?

Watch: Modern Media

The word “media” gets thrown around a lot these days to talk about news organizations like Fox, CNN, ABC, or CBS. But, what are they really? In this lesson, we will cover what the traditional media is, and explain how it makes efforts to break into the world of digital media.

With an increase in criticism of the media — some fair, some not — it is important to know what the media is. When was the last time you read a newspaper? A magazine? Watched the evening news? All of these are examples of the traditional media. In a world that is becoming more and more connected, thanks to the Internet, these traditional media outlets are having to innovate in order to keep up.

With a rise in convergent media, or media that takes advantage of both traditional and digital reporting styles, we are seeing a new evolution in news reporting as old forms of journalism fight to maintain a spot in the modern reporting landscape.

It’s important to note that “media” doesn’t just refer to news, though!

The newest Avengers movie is traditional media, too. So is the Big Bang Theory, or any of the reality television shows making the rounds this fall. Traditional media has an important role to fill as entertainment, and not just as a news source. As technology advances, so does traditional media’s capability to deliver on its job of entertaining. New forms of animation, CGI, and camera work allows for new movie-watching experiences unlike anything before.

The rise of smartphones and cheap, good cameras has lead to an increase in reality television shows, clip shows, and a whole host of other content that traditional media has begun to bring forward as audiences around the world continue to enjoy the newest shows.
Think about the media you are exposed to on a daily basis. How much of it comes from the Internet in some way, such as social media? Do you get any of your media from traditional sources? If you do, what changes have you seen as the Internet has moved in? If you don’t, why not? What changes could traditional media make to convince you to switch back?

Read: Traditional Media: What it is and How We Got Here

Overview

Within the world of mass communication, there is a split between digital media and traditional media. This lesson will cover traditional media, what it is, how it has evolved, the ethical obligations it has, and arguments against its efficacy.

What is Traditional Media?

Mass communication is an umbrella term that involves many kinds of communication. One of the subjects within this umbrella is the traditional media. Traditional media is any form of mass communication that is not a digital media. This includes things such as newspapers and magazines, television, radio, and books. Traditional media serves several purposes within our society today. One of the first things it does is provide entertainment. Traditional media accomplishes this many ways, be it primetime television shows, best-seller books, blockbuster hits, or even antique radio shows. Education and information is a second use for traditional media. Through technical manuals that teach you how to do something, 24-hour news broadcasts, or even local news shows every morning and evening, traditional media thrives on keeping people educated and updated on the most current trends and breakthroughs. Finally, traditional media serves as a place for people to voice opinions about current events and hold governments accountable. Often called the Fourth Estate, traditional media serves as a way for citizens to voice complaints with government policies, discuss issues on a large scale, and put pressure on a government to change things that the people disagree with.

The Evolution of Traditional Media

As technology advances, mass communication advances too. This is especially true of traditional media. The printing press allowed for books, newspapers, and pamphlets to be printed in mass quantities that were all the exact same message. This was a drastic change from the days when all written material was individually hand written and no two things were the same. With the change in technology came readily available information in a way that had previously never been accessible to so many people.

Printed media reigned supreme for many years until the advent of the radio. Radio allowed for live address of people all over the country, something that had never been possible before then. Radio, with its instantaneous communication ability, revolutionized the way that people received news and entertainment.

After radio came television, and that further still changed the way that people received information about the world around them. Television continued to revolutionize the media landscape with the advent of cable and the 24-hour news networks. This constant ability to be in the homes of people across the nation at the same time allowed for advertisers, news producers, and politicians to reach a larger audience than ever before.
Ethical Obligations of the Traditional Media

Ethical obligations of the media is a large discussion that has raged on for years. Ultimately the ethical responsibilities of the traditional media come down to truthful reporting, minimizing the harm it causes, and being transparent. These obligations are supported largely by existing laws in the United States as well, such as libel and slander laws and requirements that monetary support of a program or story be disclosed. When these obligations are not upheld, much harm can come from that. The traditional media has much power in American society, and using it responsibly is a must.

Arguments Against Traditional Media

The two main arguments against traditional media are speed and accuracy. With traditional media, such as a newspaper or a news broadcast, you have to wait for the information you want or need. Newspapers, at best, come once every day but news that breaks in the middle of the day has to wait hours before it gets reported. Even news networks would need to wait until their next broadcast. The introduction of 24-hour news cycles has reduced this harm, but issues presented by speed of coverage are still present. Traditional media simply struggle to keep up with the faster pace of digital media online.

Accuracy is another issue facing traditional media. When a story is misrepresented in a newspaper, they have to wait until the next publication to resolve issues with a retraction. Digital media is able to immediately correct information and publish a retraction, compared to the much slower pace of traditional media. This is a large issue in a world where “fake news” is proliferating at such a rapid pace. Being able to accurately report news quickly, and just as quickly correct mistakes when they are made, is one of the benefits of digital media. Traditional media struggles to correct these issues, but has made attempts to integrate digital presences into their coverage of issues to try to solve these problems.

Reflect Poll: Where Does the Traditional Media Go from Here?

Can traditional media evolve to compete with digital media in the age of the Internet?

- Yes
- No

Expand: Convergent Media

Overview

With constant technology evolution, media providers have had to evolve as well to keep up with the fast paced world the Internet has enabled. This section will cover what convergent media is and how it is used.

What is Convergent Media

Convergent media is the intersection of traditional and digital media. Rather than attempt to maintain coverage only in traditional spaces, media organizations have begun to integrate digital media into their existing traditional media coverage. Snapchat stories, twitter accounts, websites, mobile sites, etc. are adaptations made by traditional media outlets to keep up with the times. When people criticize traditional media for being slow or inaccurate, convergent media is their response to correct those problems.
Convergent media has many uses, but is largely used as a way to reinforce traditional media content and supplement it with additional features and coverage. For instance, CNN covers traditional media with a news channel, but also brings that coverage online to its website, a news app for smart devices, and Snapchat stories of breaking news. This attempt to revolutionize the traditional media coverage they bring to the table and evolve with the technology around them is one of the defining features of convergent media.

One of the drawbacks that convergent media raises is having to find ways to adapt coverage for multiple media. Snapchat does not allow for the same long-form coverage of a television show, and a tweet does not allow for the same in-depth reporting as an article. Finding ways to use newer forms of digital media while still maintaining the integrity and depth of traditional media is one of the most challenging aspects facing traditional media outlets today.

Additionally, because of the rise of smartphones with cameras and Internet access, traditional media is also having to compete in the digital space with the rise of bloggers and other people that are covering news stories in some of the same ways as convergent media outlets. This race for views leads traditional media outlets attempting to break into the convergent media space in a position of having to balance journalistic ethics against the need to be the first to break a story to get viewers to see their page, not someone else’s.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

A short article providing an in-depth look into the ethical obligations of traditional news media
- Link to resource: https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/who-we-are/5-principles-of-journalism

An article explaining the steps the traditional media can take to compete against digital media

A video documenting the evolution of media from traditional formats into the digital age
- Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1H1ul6vlBo

Lesson Glossary

digital media: any form of media that can be created and displayed on a digital device
traditional media: any form of mass communication that is not a digital media, including things such as newspapers and magazines, television, radio, and books
the Fourth Estate: a synonym for the media, the Fourth Estate is an entity that has large social influence on political events but is not part of the government directly itself
retraction: drawing something back in, in the context of media, because of a printing error — a typo or wrong information — then reprinting once it has been corrected
convergent media: the intersection of traditional and digital media
Check Your Knowledge

1. Traditional media is only newspapers.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Entertainment is one of the purposes of traditional media.
   a. True
   b. False

3. The printing press was instrumental in innovating traditional media.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

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