

Scholarly Article Review: McLuhan's take on media was not universally accepted.

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COMM 245: Communication Theory

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February 13th, 2021

There is one subject that is a constant in communications studies: Marshall McLuhan. He made revolutionary predictions by analyzing media and communications in a new way. By now, much of his ideas have greatly influenced the research of scholars *and* the curriculum of communication students. He was right about a lot of things. Some posit that he predicted the internet (including Amazon and Google) as well as virtual reality (VR) technology. Because, he was so spot-on in *these* areas, great emphasis is attributed to his other work as well. In the article, "Empire and Communication: the Media Wars of Marshall McLuhan," Michael MacDonald analyzes one of the core "McLuhanisms" and answers some of the legendary media theorist's harshest critics. The article also discusses what is *perhaps* McLuhan's magnum opus: Media Ecology. This idea has evolved and expanded into many areas of research that focus on "social environments created by the use of different communication technologies" (Griffin et al, 2019, p. 310).

From the start, MacDonald's article recounts how McLuhan revered the power of media. He held a distant respect for mass communication and specifically advertising; calling it a "magical institution". In his writings, Marshall McLuhan advised everyone to "view the mass media indirectly, from a critical distance, much as the mythical hero Perseus uses a mirror to gaze upon – and behead – the Medusa" (MacDonald, 2006, p. 507). Through such methods, he recognized (before the rest of academia) that media technologies were merely extensions of mankind. For example, humans are communicative, and the devices we create enable us to communicate more. Therefore, most mediums of communication are not *totally* foreign concepts and can be studied for further understanding. But even McLuhan himself could not

completely wrap his brain around every single media capability. No amount of studying could entirely encapsulate such vast possibilities. And because communication is a field that can often be up to interpretation and argument, McLuhan had some naysayers. Upon introducing the Global Village concept (a subset of media ecology which describes how technology is making the culture of the world more integrated), the Canadian scholar was criticized for being utopian. "These criticisms are not entirely unjust. At times McLuhan *does* seem to view media machines as vehicles of light into a 'cosmic harmony'" (MacDonald, 2006, p. 506). After watching videos of Marshall explaining his own theories, I've concluded that his positive attitude toward the fast-approaching communication shift was grounded in sincere hope for the future. It would be ignorant to suggest that McLuhan was naive to the dangers that instant communication posed. He understood that the global village could become "a staging area for colossal violence'" (MacDonald, 2006, p. 506). He even observed that advertising can employ the fraudulent tactics of persuasion, celebrated by the ancient Greek sophists, in order to induce 'numbness' and 'hallucination' among an audience (McLuhan et al, 1987, p. 47). But instead of inciting fear about the future, he stressed the good possibilities that could come from technological advances.

This article was remarkably informative, and I am grateful to have found it. I now understand McLuhan's ideas, namely Media Ecology, a great deal better. Additionally, reading this entry afforded me with an opportunity to reconcile McLuhan's ideas with that of his critics. All throughout, the author successfully defends McLuhan while acknowledging the correct points of his doubters.

References

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