

Julian Assange versus the world media essay



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Breathing, drinking, eating, going to the toilet, sleeping, and checking your Facebook profile: nowadays, these are the actions which basically constitute the largest portion of our daily activities. But one of these items doesn't fit very perfectly into this list. Today, there are 900 million people who have a Facebook account and they all spend more than 700 billion minutes a month logged on to this social network, according to Seth Harden (2012). Hence, we are all responsible, indirectly, of Mark Zuckerberg's nomination as Person of the Year by Time Magazine for 2010. Since 1927, Time Magazine has been honoring certain "notions" - a person, an object, or even a concept - that are deemed most influential on our society each year. But what does this whole networking platform add to our lives? What does it possess that is so special and why has it changed the course of our lives - permanently maybe? Another candidate for the award was Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, an Australian international organization that brings up massively important news and information that should have been secret to the public. When looking at the controversy raised all around the world by Time Magazine's decision of awarding Zuckerberg with the Man of the Year Award over Assange in December 2010, one would suggest finding out whether the Wikileaks founder would have been a better choice than Facebook's CEO, since he has exposed news and information that has been much more beneficial to our societies worldwide despite the fact that many would argue that Facebook has influenced our culture like no other previous phenomenon.

Born on May 14, 1984 in Dobbs Ferry, New York, Mark Zuckerberg was already a computer programmer at the age of 12. During his first year at

Harvard University, Zuckerberg developed a “ face-selection” online program called “ The Face Book”. Its main purpose was to allow its users to choose between two girl faces based on “ who is hot and who is not”! This project then evolved into becoming a certain type of social network – The Harvard Connection. After dropping out from Harvard, Zuckerberg’s project became the social network known as “ Facebook” and reached a million users within its first few months. (Mark Zuckerberg, 2011). According to Angela Lewis (2010), she asserts that Facebook is the “ second most visited website in the world”, and “ the fastest growing demographic 35-plus group.” (p. 1). As a result of Facebook’s popularity, Mark Zuckerberg has become the twenty-fifth most powerful man alive and the thirty-fifth youngest billionaire in the world (World’s Most Powerful People, 2012) . However, Zuckerberg’s wealth and power solely depends on us, the users of his social network who are unaware that the whole Facebook phenomenon does nothing but benefit its creator.

Today, as Facebook users, we have become “ Facebook dependent”. In a recent research about Facebook addiction conducted by the University of Bergen in 2012, results have shown that since Facebook became as ubiquitous as television in our everyday lives, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many people to know if they are addicted to social media. Indeed, Facebook addiction has become such an overwhelming phenomenon that has invaded our societies worldwide. This new type of addiction is very similar to other types of dependencies. Addiction to smoking is an obvious example. Studies have shown that it displays similar characteristics to any sort of addiction: The user thinks that he is doing something productive

when he clearly is not. He believes that his life would be less fun without it, despite having a totally different open world waiting for him. In addition to all of that, the addicted user considers it harmless when in fact the addiction greatly impacts his productivity, concentration, self-esteem and well-being; finally, he thinks it is cool when in fact it is not. (PressWire, 2012). This is not only the case with Facebook. Twitter and other social networks have been considered objects of addiction as well. People using these social networks are totally unaware of the fact that their whole life is at stake when logging onto the social platform and exchanging information with friends, family members, or any random fellow user. Basically, many of us do not have the habit of reading the Terms and Policy of any online website we subscribe to. Hence, we are definitely missing out on details that might be fatal for our security. For instance, Facebook keeps track of one's online activity while logged onto the social network. In other words, it knows what other websites the user is using and precisely what he is doing. Furthermore, Facebook's policy states that all media or information published by any user is definitely "public" and the Facebook team is free to access it anytime it wishes to. Finally, if a user decides to delete or deactivate his/her account, his personal information will still exist in the Facebook databases; in other words, there is no such thing as privacy on these kind of social platforms. Simply, Facebook is doing nothing but wasting our time, our lives, and our ambition. It destroys our privacy and, based on a study conducted in 2010 on children and teenagers who use Facebook and Twitter in Australia, results show that these websites only contribute by "making kids dumber" (The Hindustan Times). Therefore, we might consider Mark Zuckerberg a "privacy thief" or an international serial killer whose victims are people's minds and

imaginations. However, one must not blame him alone, but blame all Facebook users for their “unawareness”. Time Magazine awarded Zuckerberg the Person of the Year award in 2010 for his work in the development and easing of communication around the world, despite creating a worldwide addiction and manipulating users’ personal information.

Despite all of Facebook’s negativities, many consider Zuckerberg a hero that has influenced the course of our daily lives. They claim that Facebook allows them to communicate with their families all around the world, as well as get in touch with the outside world, meet new people, and share their experiences. Some even dare to postulate that Facebook is a way to relieve stress, and others support Zuckerberg just because Facebook is a medium through which one can post his/her photos, which is totally absurd. For starters, concerning the “revolutionary” idea of Facebook, we all basically know that communicating with friends, family and coworkers in an interactive way is easily done through Skype since the year 2002. Moreover, one must note that Skype provides us with its services without the need to communicate personal information with the headquarters. Moreover, regarding the argument which states that Facebook helps in making new friends, one would simply suggest that there is actually no better way to make friends than going out to the “real” world, socializing with the people at the school, university or the workplace. But let us assume for a moment, that genuine friendships could be made through a social network. One cannot be sure whom he is talking to and sharing his experiences, photos, thoughts and personal information with. The probability of communicating these private photos and facts of one’s life to a hacker is very high. No real

friendships exist on Facebook. When someone has a thousand friends or more on Facebook, do you think that he/she really knows all these people? Are they really friends? Should they be called “ friends” in the first place? Scientists have proven that having more than 150 friends at a time is irrational and impossible. Finally, doctors have got the answer for those claiming that Facebook is stress-relieving: Facebook users with more friends suffer more stress and “ neurotic limbo” from feeling they have to continually update and amuse their larger audiences, according to a research conducted by Dr. Kathy Charles at the University of Edinburgh in 2011 (J-A. Barnes, 2012). A better and more efficient way to reduce stress is to run, walk, and work out. Therefore, we may conclude that there is no solid and concrete reason leading to award Mark Zuckerberg with the Person of the Year 2010 title over other candidates that have really influenced the course of the international political scene in the same year.

The competition’s runner-up and overwhelming reader favorite, Julian Assange, is a forty two year old activist, publisher and journalist who is mostly renowned for being the founder and editor-in-chief of Wikileaks. Despite, winning first place in the online survey, Time Magazine rejected the voters’ will and selected Mark Zuckerberg as Man of the Year. In his youth, Assange was a hacker-activist who then became a computer programmer and journalist, winning the 2011 Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism for his contributions to freedom of speech all around the world with Wikileaks (Davin, 2011). He was prosecuted in 2011 for rape in Sweden but was convinced that “ my [his] prosecution for rape in the Swedish courts was engineered by vengeful U. S. intelligence”. Today, after being imprisoned

several times in the past couple of years, he is in political asylum, granted to him on August 16th 2012, by the Ecuadorian Foreign Minister. As stated on their official webpage, Wikileaks is a non-profit media organization. Since 2007, its goal was to bring important news and information to the public and provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way for sources to leak information to its journalists. One of Wikileaks' most important activities is to publish original source material alongside news stories so that "readers and historians alike can see evidence of the truth". Wikileaks has sustained and triumphed against legal and political attacks designed to silence the publishing organization, journalists and anonymous sources.

According to Time Magazine (2011), regardless of what happened or happens to Assange, which he will almost certainly not deserve, the construction of stateless, secure and indestructible Internet drop boxes through which anonymous Internet users can access to circulate highly important data to is an unprecedented innovation. Secrets will never be safe again, or more specifically, they will never be hidden from the people again. Showing his true goal through the Wikileaks project, Julian Assange was asked on the December 19th 2010 episode of Saturday Night Live "What are the differences between Mark Zuckerberg and me [him]?" and answered ironically that "I [he] give private information on corporations to you for free, and I'm a villain. Zuckerberg gives your private information to corporations for money and he's Man of the Year." Therefore, Wikileaks may change things in a permanent ongoing way. By uncovering the truth on the political and geopolitical scenes all around the world through an open and privacy-free platform such as the Internet, Wikileaks has radically changed

the way we perceive social media, politics and diplomatic relations between governments in a positive manner. Moreover, it has raised awareness among the world population concerning transparency and the honesty of governments towards the people.

However, the whole Wikileaks organization is facing worldwide opposition, especially by the governments. For instance, according to the Washington Post, The Obama administration warned Wikileaks chief Julian Assange that the expected release of approximately 250, 000 secret State Department documents would have “grave consequences” and place the lives of journalists, human rights activists and soldiers, at risk (G. Kessler, 28 November 2010) showing that the United States of America are ready to endanger their civilians violate journalists’ rights in order to keep its secrets away from the public. In addition, a law has been voted on recently condemning every individual living in the United States to a minimum sentence of 2 years in jail in case he/she decides to share information with Wikileaks, showing once more how the Obama administration is resolved to oppress the freedom of speech and opinion. Therefore, regardless of whether one only considers positive events on choosing the Person of the Year, the choice may have been more credible or simply more adequate, to have Julian Assange as Person of the Year 2010.

Meanwhile, some opposite viewpoints may state that Wikileaks is harmful towards a country’s national security and assume that it is the sole reason behind depriving Assange the Man of the Year title. As they may see it, the people holding these points of views think that the whole organization causes a wave of protest against the political and governing class inside a

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country, hence disturbing its national security and prosperity. These arguments are most commonly held by people close to the reigning regime or class. They need to keep their interests secure at all price, and would do whatever that is in their power to stop any opposition to their system. This notion gives us an idea of what director Michael Moore discusses throughout his movies and how he describes his conspiracy theory, which becomes clearer day after day, and revealed secret after revealed secret. These classes of people governing the world, these self-centered egoistic maniacs who control the media through their own TV stations only think about their interests, their final income, their next target and so on... they are living their sick life regardless of the people's will, despite being in the position they are in thanks to them. The people have rights: they have the right to know, especially to know what is really happening behind the walls, in offices, and underneath the tables. It is our right to know whether we are being lied to each and every day. If we were subject to " treason" in any way, we have the right to manifest and contest the political system governing our country in order to achieve total justice within it. That is why the argument mostly used by " this kind" of people is not solid. It is simply biased and by no means objective.

In conclusion, one may easily doubt the Man of the Year award's credibility and the criteria used in order to award a certain individual, object or concept. However, in the Time press release, Mark Zuckerberg said " At a very high level, some of the themes [Facebook and Wikileaks] could be connected...the Wikileaks story I think is fascinating but I also don't think we're anywhere near the end of it." (Zuckerberg, December 2011) The

Facebook CEO's statement suggests that although Facebook has brought many changes to our social life, if Wikileaks' path is finally more publically supported, spreading knowledge and avoiding public deception, then Julian Assange is clearly the man who will have improved more lives and even saved them. However, he has been maligned in the press, thrown in jail, and had his name dragged through the mud. On the same Saturday Night Live episode stated earlier, he sarcastically stated that " thanks to Wikileaks, you can see how corrupt governments operate in the shadows and lie to those who elect them. Thanks to Facebook, you can finally figure out which Sex and the City character you are...I'm a Samantha, but if the Swedish police ask, I'm a Charlotte." showing the superficiality and uselessness of a project such as Facebook. Finally, one may ask: Will anyone remember this title in a few years? I think probably not. Winners of such awards are often related to events that seem like a much bigger deal at the time. For instance, does anyone recall why Vladimir Putin won it a couple of years ago?