Impact of the internet and media for modern youth

Technology, Internet

INTERNET ON MODERN YOUTH The content of the current mediacultureis often blind to a young person's cultural, economic and educational background. The concept of a media culture has evolvedowing to the increased volume, variety and importance of mediated signs and messagesand the interplay of interlaced meanings. In the world of young people, themedia are saturated by popular culture and penetrate politics, the economy, leisuretime andeducation. At present, the global media culture is a pedagogic force that hasthe potential to exceed the achievements of institutionalized forms of education.

AsHenry Giroux puts it:" With the rise of new media technologies and the global reach of thehighly concentrated culture industries, the scope and impact of theeducational force of culture in shaping and refiguring all aspects of daily life appear unprecedented. Yet the current debates have generallyignored the powerful pedagogical influence of popular culture, along with the implications it has for shaping curricula, questioningnotions of high-status knowledge, and redefining the relationship between the culture of schooling and the cultures of everyday life. 6The concept of media culture encompasses not simply symbolic combinationsof immaterial signs or capricious currents of old and new meanings, but an entire wayof life7 in which images, signs, texts and other audio-visual representations are connectedwith the real fabric of material realities, symbols and artificialities. 8Media culture is pervasive; its messages are an important part of the everydaylives of young people, and their daily activities are structured around media use.

Thestories and images in the media become important tools for identity construction. A pop star provides a model for clothing and other style choices, and language used bya cartoon character becomes a key factor in the street credibility of young people. Under the present circumstances, there are few places left in the world where onemight escape the messages and meanings embedded in the televised media culture.

In a mediated culture, it can be difficult for young people to discern whose representationsare closest to the truth, which representations to believe, and whichimages matter. This is partly because the emergence of digitalizedcommunicationand the commoditization of culture have significantly altered the conditions under whichlife and culture are experienced. Many are still attached to the romantic image of organic communities in which people converse with one another face-to-face and livein a close-knit localenvironment.

Digital communication is gradually undermining thistraditional approach:" Most of the ways in which we make meanings, most of our communicationsto other people, are not directly human and expressive, butinteractions in one way or another worked through commodities andcommodity relations: TV, radio, film, magazines, music, commercialdance, style, fashion, commercial leisure venues. These are major realignments. " 9In the world of young people, the media culture may be characterized primarilyin terms of three distinct considerations. First, it is produced and reproduced bydiverse ICT sources.

It is therefore imperative to replace the teaching of knowledgeand skills central to agrarian and industrial societies with education in digital literacy. A similar point is made by Douglas Kellner, who contends that in a media culture it isimportant to learn multiple ways of interacting with social reality. 10 Children and young people must be provided with opportunities to acquire skills in multiple literacies toenable them to develop their identities, social relationships and communities, whether material, virtual, or a combination of the two.

Second, the media culture of youth extends beyond signs and symbols, manifestingitself in young people's physical appearance and movements. The media cultureinfluence is visible in how youth present themselves to the world through meansmade available by prevailing fashions; the body is a sign that can be used effectivelyto produce acultural identity. Furthermore, various kinds of media-transmitted skillsand knowledge are stored and translated into movements of the body. This is evidentin a number of youth subcultures involving certain popular sports, games andmusic/dances such as street basketball, skateboarding and hip hop.

The body is highly susceptible to different contextual forms of control. Whilethey are in school, pupils' movements are regulated by certain control mechanismsand cognitive knowledge. In the streets, youth clubs and private spaces, however, their bodies function according to a different logic. Informal knowledge absorbed throughthe media culture requires some conscious memorizing but also involves physicallearning, quite often commercialized.

11Third, in the experience of young people, media culture represents a sourceof pleasure and relative autonomy compared with home or school.

As P. Willis states:" Informal cultural practices are undertaken because of the pleasuresand satisfactions they bring, including a fuller and more roundedsense of the self, of ' really being yourself' within your own knowablecultural world. This entails finding better fits than the institutionally or ideologically offered ones, between the collective and cultural senses — the way it walks, talks, moves, dances, expresses, displays— and its actual conditions of existence; finding a way of ' beingin the world' with style at school, at work, in the street. 12Experts on young people have long appreciated the complexity of the conceptof youth, especially when examined from a global perspective. The best summation is perhaps that the concept of youth today is historically and contextually conditioned; in other words, it is relative as well as socially and culturally constructed. 13 In the presentmedia culture, the age at whichchildhoodis perceived to end is declining, and the period of youth seems to be extending upward.

It is useful, however, to recall that the majority of young people in the worlddo not live according to the Western conceptions of youth. For them, childhood andadolescence in the Western sense exist only indirectly through media presentations. The same media culture influences seem to be in effect outside the Western world, but their consequences are likely to be somewhat different owing mainly to variationsin definitions of childhood and youth and to the different authority relationships prevailing in individual cultures.

Children and young people are often seen as innocent victims of the pervasive and powerful media. In the extreme view, the breakdown of thenuclear family, teenage pregnancy, venereal disease, paedophilia, child trafficking and child prostitutionspreading through the Internet, drug use, juvenile crime, the degeneration of manners, suicideand religious cults are all seen as problems exacerbated or even inflicted upon