

Television and cinema in today's context



Communication has evolved from aural means (such as the example of Persian king Darius I, whom used his men to serve as communication tools by shouting messages at positioned heights) to inscriptions (as used by the Romans and Persians amongst others) to print in the beginning of the sixteenth century. The rise of print has also allowed new languages to flourish especially Spanish, French, Portuguese and English. These languages became the predominant vehicle of communication for the European colonial powers in numerous parts of the globe. The 'transplantation of communications system around the globe created a new hierarchy of language and culture in conquered territories' (Thussu 2006, pp. 2).

According to Carey (1999) 'the growth of communications in the nineteenth century had the practical effect of diminishing space as a differentiating criterion in human affairs'. The development of telegraph has enabled rapid transference of information that of which only requires minutes when it would have taken months should post come via sea. This evolution of communication has aided people in terms of business opportunities and times of war which were numerous in that era.

Western countries were quick to grasp the implications of new technologies such as printing presses and radio communication following their introduction. And to this day, western countries are the communication mammoths of the world. Radio was a popular tool for propaganda in both the First World War and Second World War such was the same for news agencies. Western countries - the information rich were in a position to 'dictate terms to the information poor, creating a structure of dependency with widespread economic, political and social ramifications for the poor

societies' (Thussu 2006, pp. 31). This situation has favourably turned for the best in recent years. But it is seen that messages are dispersed and received to the public using mediums of communication be it print, radio or even word of mouth.

According to Williams (1974) though there is a fundamental assumption that television and cinema has altered the world there is a division of opinions.

First opinion, also known as technological determinism, is that the technology is accidental. It is a view that 'new technologies are discovered by an essentially internal process of research and development which then sets the conditions for social change and progress' (Williams 1974, pp. 7).

Which means to say that should the television or cinema have not been thought off, warranted events (cultural or social) would not have eventuated.

Second opinion is that even though technologies are discovered by accident as a medium in a process of change, its intendment lies in its use which are held to be 'symptomatic of some order of society or some qualities of human nature which are otherwise determined' (Williams 1974, pp. 6).

Should cinema or television have not been thought off and yielded; this opinion would still run as the public would be manipulated in some other way.

But nevertheless, these opinions are deeply rooted in social thoughts that it is essentially profound to think beyond them as histories of technology are written, unconsciously or consciously, based on assumptions.

Cinema and television has exponential influence in today's world though it should be noted that they are not the only mass media mediums with the

ability to have leverage on public. Cinema and television have altered the way in which beauty is perceived and paved away stereotype images.

Women seen on the screens are often extremely beautiful to be appreciated as beautiful. This could be reversed for men; actors are often macho and handsome. Less than attractive people are often given the smaller or side-kick roles. This stereotype has led to the issue of body-image. Bulimia and anorexia are eating disorders that are rampant in today's teenage and young adult's world. Individuals who withhold food from their body or whom willingly vomit to keep their bodies svelte and conform to today's definition of beautiful.

A television show that is going against this norm is Ugly Betty which features a less than attractive female lead. The show ran for four seasons before ending in 2010.

Other stereotypes that emerge from cinema and television are the perceptions that all Asians have small eyes, high school band members are nerdy, blondes are ditzy and dumb or men with shoulder length hair are surfer dudes.

There is an increase openness towards sexuality: gay, bisexual or straight. Global giant and financial leader of television and cinema (Thussu 2006, pp. 121), Hollywood has made it possible for such characterisations to be made public in television shows such as The OC, Glee and Ugly Betty and movies such as Brokeback Mountain and Transamerica. It could not be said that the public is more tolerant of sexuality as this acceptance is based on individuals. The openness towards sexuality could also have a negative

impact on the public as there are films and television shows that promote adultery and cheating.

Television and cinema has minimized the issue of geographical distance. What people see on these two medium are relatable in their lives and could be applied to a situation that is similar to what an individual is going through no matter where they habit in. For example, if a Singaporean individual is confused about her sexuality, mediums that feature such a topic could easily be relatable to her and thus she could seek a sense of direction from them despite where they originated from be it America, United Kingdom or wherever else in the world .

Television and cinema are exaggerated by nature to allow people to be more engaged. Thus what people see on these mediums are not the exact truths nor can they happen in real life. These mediums are developed yearly with increasing viewer's appeal (more explosions, more sexually charged, more dramatic) to rake in more monetary profit for the distributors. Though at times hold truth such as the case of the movie Blood Diamond, a fictional story with real issues (the mining of diamonds in Africa) and real events.

Though influences are not hard truth from reality of the world, majority of people could relate their reality to what they see on the medium. It is uncommon to hear comments in conversations that are tied to these mediums. For example: " I had a Rachel Berry (reference to television show: Glee) moment. I literally word vomit (reference to movie: Mean Girls) my excuse to the lecturer."

New social groups and communities are formed defined by their interest such as favourite movies and television shows. Television and cinemas are also influential not only in terms of characters but also in fashion and materialism - product placement of brands that could be seen in the mediums.

Lately, there is an increase in television shows and cinema that are adapted from books. Monetary appeal as distributors is able to franchise out into merchandises and sequels or prequels and soundtracks. Such as: Twilight, Harry Potter and Pretty Little Liars.

In conclusion, television and cinemas has altered the way in which the public view the world. Though situations on screens are exaggerated, they are still influential and could leave a lasting impression on an individual. It should be noted that television and cinema are not the only mass mediums in the world. In today's times the synergy of mass mediums provides a bigger profit margin for distributors.