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Content in the New Media Environment: The Interaction of Medium and Message

Abstract

This article examines the intricate relationship between content and medium in the new media environment, emphasizing the transformative impact of digital technologies on communication practices. The rapid evolution from traditional media to digital platforms has fundamentally altered how content is produced, disseminated, and consumed. Utilizing Marshall McLuhan's assertion that the medium is the message, the study investigates how diverse mediums such as social media, video-sharing sites, and digital texts shape the interpretation and reception of content. Through a mixed-methods approach, this research combines a theoretical analysis with an original survey of media and content consumers, aiming to capture how ordinary users perceive the relationship between media platforms and message influence. Survey results offer a practical view into audience attitudes, revealing insights on user engagement, participatory culture, and the shift from passive content consumption to active participation in content creation and distribution. By analyzing cultural context and the dynamics of user-generated content, this research demonstrates how the interplay between medium and message impacts audience perceptions and reshapes the media landscape. Understanding this interaction is crucial for navigating the complexities of contemporary information flows and informing future media practices and strategies. This article contributes to media studies discourse, providing insights into the evolving nature of content in the digital age.



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Keywords: *new media, content, medium, communication, user engagement, participatory culture, information technology, social media, audience interaction, media studies*

Yeni Media Mühitində Məzmun: Medium və Mesajın Qarşılıqlı Əlaqəsi

Xülasə

Bu məqalə yeni media mühitində məzmun və vasitə arasındakı mürəkkəb əlaqəni tədqiq edir və rəqəmsal texnologiyaların kommunikasiya praktikalarına olan transformativ təsirini vurğulayır. Ənənəvi mediadan rəqəmsal platformalara keçid məzmunun yaradılması, yayılması və istehlakını əsaslı şəkildə dəyişmişdir. Marşall Makluhenin "vasitə mesajın özüdür" ifadəsinə əsaslanan bu tədqiqat sosial şəbəkələr, video platformaları və rəqəmsal mətnlər kimi müxtəlif vasitələrin məzmunun qəbuluna və izahına necə təsir etdiyini araşdırır. Qarışıq metodologiyadan istifadə edən tədqiqat həm nəzəri təhlili, həm də media və məzmun istehlakçıları arasında keçirilmiş orijinal sorğunu özündə birləşdirir. Bu sorğu adi istifadəçilərin media platformaları ilə mesaj arasındakı əlaqəni necə qavradıqlarını göstərməyi hədəfləyir. Sorğunun nəticələri auditoriyanın rəyi ilə bağlı praktiki baxış təqdim edərək, istifadəçi iştirakı, iştirakçı mədəniyyəti və məzmunun passiv istehlakından onun yaradılması və yayılmasında aktiv iştiraka keçid barədə dəyərli məlumatlar ortaya qoyur. Mədəni konteksti və istifadəçi tərəfindən yaradılan məzmunun dinamikasını təhlil edərək, bu tədqiqat vasitə ilə mesaj arasındakı qarşılıqlı təsirin auditoriya qəbuluna və ümumi media mühitinin dəyişməsinə necə təsir etdiyini nümayiş etdirir. Bu qarşılıqlı əlaqəni anlamaq, müasir informasiya axınının mürəkkəbliklərini naviqasiya etmək və gələcək media praktika və strategiyalarını formalaşdırmaq üçün mühüm əhəmiyyət kəsb edir. Məqalə media tədqiqatları üzrə diskursa töhfə verərək, rəqəmsal dövrdə məzmunun inkişaf edən təbiəti haqqında dəyərli biliklər təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: *yeni media, məzmun, ətraf mühit, kommunikasiya, istifadəçi cəlbi, iştirakçı mədəniyyət, informasiya texnologiyaları, sosial şəbəkələr, auditoriya ilə qarşılıqlı əlaqə, media araşdırması*

Introduction

The new media environment represents a significant shift from traditional media paradigms, characterized by enhanced interactivity, user-generated content, and the proliferation of digital platforms. This transformation has altered how information is disseminated and consumed. McLuhan's assertion that the medium shapes the message remains highly relevant; the characteristics of each medium influence not only how content is presented but also how it is interpreted and understood by audiences. This thesis investigates the multifaceted interactions between medium and content, highlighting the implications for creators and consumers in the digital age. The phrase "the medium is the message," coined by Marshall McLuhan in his 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, remains central in media studies and

communication theory. McLuhan's theory suggests that the medium (the channel or technology) used to convey information has a more profound effect on human perception and society than the content it delivers. This theory has evolved and inspired a range of interpretations and critiques, many of which address the interplay between medium and message and debate the extent to which each influences society and communication. Here's an overview of key literature and perspectives that explore or expand on this concept:

1. Marshall McLuhan's Core Theory

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argues that each medium whether television, print, or digital shapes society through sensory and cognitive changes. For instance, television, combining image and sound, influences cognition differently than print, which is visual and linear. McLuhan famously views the medium itself as the "message," asserting that it fundamentally changes how people interact with and interpret information. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), he examines how specific technologies, such as the printing press, transformed cultural and cognitive structures, emphasizing linear and individualistic thinking that reshaped Western society. Extending McLuhan's theory, Neil Postman's media ecology framework suggests that media environments shape public discourse and consciousness. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), Postman argues that television prioritizes visual entertainment over rational discourse, affecting political and social discussions. Similarly, Joshua Meyrowitz, in *No Sense of Place* (1985), explores how electronic media blur public and private boundaries, emphasizing that each medium has distinct social impacts based on how it controls information and creates new "spaces." Technological Determinism and Social Shaping of Technology. McLuhan's ideas are often associated with *technological determinism*, the belief that technology itself drives societal change. Scholars like Raymond Williams and James Carey critique this view, advocating for a more *socially shaped* perspective. They argue that society and culture influence how media are developed and used, suggesting a dynamic relationship between technology, society, and meaning. In addition, Raymond Williams in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) argues against a purely deterministic view, asserting that while media have structural impacts, society's values and interests also shape media development.

2. "The Message is the Medium"-Reversed Interpretations

Some scholars explore the inverse of how the content or message shapes the choice and impact of the medium. This concept suggests that the message can sometimes define the most

appropriate medium for its dissemination. For instance, Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996) suggests that in the digital age, the message (content) often dictates the medium. Social media, for instance, evolved in response to the types of content and social interactions users wanted to share. This view emphasizes how societal demand for certain types of messages influences medium evolution. The rise of digital and networked media has renewed interest in McLuhan's ideas. Media scholars, such as Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture* (2006), argue that the internet blurs the boundaries between producer and consumer, altering the medium-message relationship by enabling greater user control over both. In *The Shallows* (2010), Nicholas Carr argues that digital media alters cognitive processes. This aligns with McLuhan's thesis, showing how digital devices encourage fast, surface-level engagement rather than deep reflection, impacting both the content and form of media consumption.

The theory has been applied to analyze media choices in various fields, from advertising to politics, where the choice of medium (e.g., social media, print, or video) is often more significant than the message in shaping audience perception and behavior. This theory is particularly relevant in fields like education and psychology, where digital and interactive media's influence on cognition and behavior is extensively studied. Research in these areas often demonstrates how technology's structure influences learning processes and neurological development. In summary, while McLuhan's original theory prioritizes the medium's impact on perception, subsequent scholarship reveals a complex interplay where the content, context, and medium co-evolve. The digital age has brought further complexity, with platforms like social media reshaping what it means to convey a message and the medium's influence on shaping societal norms and personal cognition.

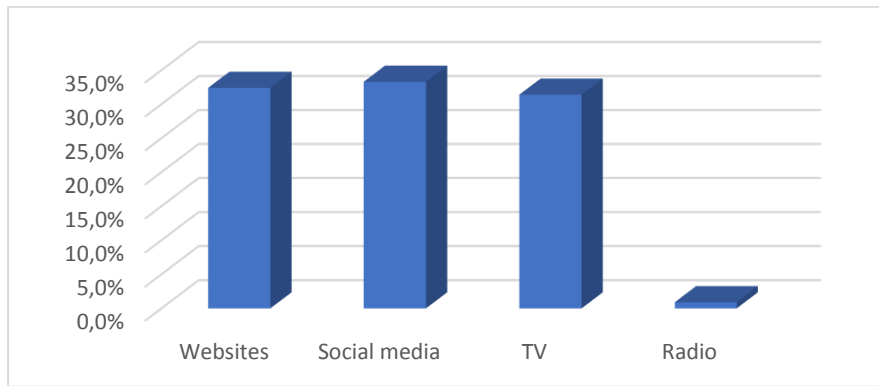
McLuhan's (1964) asserts that "the medium is the message" posits that the characteristics of the medium itself its form, structure, and method of delivery play a crucial role in shaping the interpretation and impact of the content. Digital platforms like social media amplify this effect by enabling instant sharing and multimedia integration, thus challenging traditional modes of storytelling and news dissemination (Katz, 2017). In this environment, the line between producer and consumer blurs, and content is shaped by the interactions between users and the algorithms that prioritize certain messages over others (Gillespie, 2018).

Empirical research has found that the credibility of content is influenced by the platform on which it appears. Studies by Flanagin and Metzger (2000) show that individuals tend to trust content differently based on its medium, with traditional news outlets often perceived as more

credible than social media sources. In contrast, social media platforms, with their potential for real-time updates and interactivity, are valued for their immediacy and perceived transparency (Newman et al., 2021). The digital medium thus directly affects user engagement, with platforms like X and Instagram favoring brief, visual content that captures attention quickly.

The results of our online academic survey with 106 participants via Google Forms offer different perspectives. Before diving into the findings, a brief overview of the respondents is provided. The majority of participants are women (61%) and primarily hold undergraduate degrees. Most responses came from people aged 16-24 (33%) and 35-44 (32%). Social topics were the most interesting for nearly half of the participants (49%). Over half (59%) stated that both medium and message are equally important and mutually reinforcing (Figure 1).

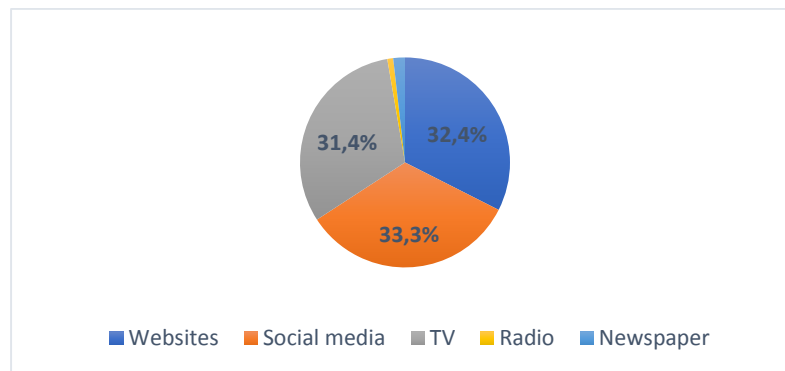
Figure 1. Is the medium or the message more important?



Participants indicated that they are most drawn to reading information or content based on the accuracy of facts and reliability of sources (34%). Content featuring statistics and research garnered substantial interest (21%), followed by the topic's relevance. Interestingly, very few selected multimedia as a primary interest, although 34% prefer news presented in multimedia formats, while the majority favor text. We believe this preference may be due to a lack of interactive, multimedia-rich news in the media landscape in Azerbaijan.

Although social media is the primary source of information for most participants (69%), other reliable sources mentioned include news websites and television (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Which mediums are more reliable?



3. The Interaction of Medium and Content

Medium as a Shaping Force: Different mediums, such as television, radio, and the internet, possess unique characteristics that affect content presentation and audience engagement. For instance, video content typically elicits a stronger emotional response than text-based content, impacting its shareability and reach (Burgess & Green, 2009). Formats and User Experience: The format in which content is delivered influences user experience. Social media platforms facilitate rapid dissemination and remixing of content, leading to new forms such as memes and viral videos (Shifman, 2011). The ease of sharing and creating content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram exemplifies this dynamic.

The new media environment fosters active interactivity and participation from users, transforming them from passive consumers to active contributors. Jenkins (2006) emphasizes the concept of "participatory culture," where audiences engage in content creation and dissemination, blurring the lines between producers and consumers. Cultural Context and Interpretation: The cultural context in which content is consumed significantly shapes its interpretation. Couldry (2010) argues that different social and cultural backgrounds influence how content is understood and shared. This highlights the necessity of considering cultural dynamics when analyzing media content.

The evolution from print to digital media has introduced complex dynamics in how messages are crafted and received. According to Ong (1982), the shift from oral to written culture redefined knowledge structures, and a similar transformation is evident today as society moves from print and broadcast to digital platforms. Kittler (1999) further argues that each medium carries inherent biases that shape societal structures and information flow, suggesting that the characteristics of

digital media such as interactivity and accessibility reshape public discourse by democratizing content production.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interaction between medium and message in the new media environment reveals critical insights into contemporary communication practices. The characteristics of each medium shape how content is created, shared, and consumed, while user engagement and cultural context further influence these dynamics. Understanding this interplay is essential for navigating the complexities of the digital information landscape. As media evolve, the relationship between medium and content will remain a vital area of inquiry for scholars and practitioners alike.

The interaction between medium and message in the new media environment reshapes not only how content is disseminated but also how it is perceived, interpreted, and trusted by audiences. The digital medium's emphasis on immediacy, interactivity, and algorithmic selection transforms traditional information channels, creating new challenges and opportunities for content creators and consumers alike. As media continues to evolve, further research on platform influence, content credibility, and ethical standards in content creation will be crucial to understanding the long-term impacts of digital media on society.

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