Print And Electronic Media Essay, Research Paper

It is an undisputed fact that technology has changed nearly every facet of our lives. Technology and electronics have altered the ways in which we live, communicate and think. Most of the globe’s current population could not revert back to functioning without their pagers, cellular phones and now even e-mail. These technological upsurges have managed to injected societies everywhere with hopes for unimaginable developments in every field possible. There are supporters and demurs of this evolution focusing on most every aspect, from the growing prevalence of the Internet to the affects of television on children. Among these considerations is the idea of whether or not print will be completely eradicated by the effects of electronic media. However, adapting such a deterministic perspective seems much too harsh. As electronic media impinges upon the roles of print media, it is unnecessary to predict the disappearance of the medium itself, as print culture is clearly alive and well. This is especially palpable when observing the properties of print media, the economic affects as well as the influence of convergence linking those same technologies.

Since the development of paper in the 12th century, books were created, and teaching and businesses have never been the same. (Seminar 7: 1999) As with every new technology, a huge revolution was shaped creating a uniformity of language, de-emphasizing the dominant oral culture. (Seminar 7: 1999) Mindsets were altered and the ways in which members of that society communicated, lived and thought were changed forever. As a result of print, experience was translated into a different form, where it became a new way of viewing reality. (Seminar 7: 1999) Print communication became a fundamental act of translation where symbols were turned into their verbal references and in turn understood in terms of their universal meanings. (Birkerts; 122) Since reading became a critical skill in education, pamphlets, books then magazines all aided in the process of teaching and obliterating the monopoly of knowledge. Through print, uniformity among language and people was formed that still exists today.

The various media that exist with respect to print include everything from textbooks to travel brochures. There are many properties that these items and only these items possess – characteristics that are lacking in any other medium. When compared to computer technology and monitor capabilities, print rises above. Electronic texts could never incorporate many of the benefits offered by print media – specifically books. These features include portability, durability, affordability, readability and it’s ability to be personalized. (Fidler: 1998) When looking at each of these more closely, we can see that books prevail over monitors or any concept that could possibly replace text of any sort.

The portability offered by books allows us to read anywhere; subways, in the car, sitting on a park bench or even laying in the bathtub. Curling up in bed with a computer is not what one would call cozy. When attempting to incorporate features and characteristics of print media into a computer, it currently seems impossible. To get a computer to weigh less than 2 pounds, not larger than a magazine at the most, to be waterproof, and convenient would be very difficult to accomplish. (Fidler: 1998) To find a computer that would be wouldn’t break when dropped, or require moving parts would also be hard to achieve and to think of the cost of replacement – endless. Now as technology evolves on a consistent basis, newer and better products are developed, leaving a current purchaser of such merchandise with a feeling of uncertainty – is this the best time to buy? Should I wait for the next model? Even when we acquire these magical products, bigger and improved supersede months later. With a book there exists a consistency, where it may tatter and tear, but essentially the essence of what it is – something that can be held and felt, lingers forever. Print media are inexpensive and can be replaced almost always – for a trace of what it would cost to replace electronic goods. How can anyone go wrong? For someone to suggest that a computer can replace the standing of books and other print media in our society, they must truly rethink their argument. The physical nature of books and periodicals allow us to throw them around, tear articles out that are of interest to us, and discard them as we wish; printing out screens is not nearly as versatile.

The most important factor when comparing the characteristics possessed by print media versus electronic is the aspect of readability. Paper is still the best display medium for reading textual documents. (Fidler: 1998) It provides ideal reflection and resolution that is easily adjusted with tools we almost all possess – eyes. Soft copy, which includes liquid crystal displays and computer monitors, rely on cathode ray tubes, which for some, actually inhibits reading. Despite the remarkable progress of monitors these days, the majority of people, like myself, still prefer hard copy to soft. What would a mansion be without an enormous library? Is seeing an image on a screen of ancient scripture the same as the real thing? Nothing can mimic or reproduce that. Books also allow readers an expression of individuality throughout their reading experience(s). Students often have the option of highlighting portions of books, mothers can write little messages to their daughter in the front cover for their birthdays – something that a computer would have a hard time competing with. Although digital editions of books on computers would allow for protection against what some would call defacing, libraries are still circulating their books and adding more to their collection. (Fidler: 1998)

Throughout the last decade, we have seen an increase in the use of the Internet, which grows more rapidly with each passing day. Those who are among the avid investors know very well that the World Wide Web is certainly a place where money can be made. Computer companies such as Microsoft and Novell are leaders in their fields, spreading into every branch of technology available. Despite all of the investment and growth found within this domain, we have also seen an unbelievable expansion of book superstores both in the United States and just 4 years ago in Canada. Chapters Bookstore, a Canadian based company has been the top Canadian retailer for the last three years. Since it’s inception, Chapters has flourished, from just 4 locations in Canada to nearly 100 by the end of next year. (Chapters: 1999) Indigo, another Canadian based bookstore chain has also done very well, expanding throughout the Toronto area. The irony in this is that the majority of the technological development and investment made in computers stems from North America, this is the very same source from which the development of mega-stores is promoted. Why would those who know so much about what is going on technologically still invest in something that, according to so many, will become outdated by new inventions?

The evolution of technologies through the ages has proven that the content of any new medium is an old medium. (Seminar 8: 1999)There has been an upsurge of convergence among technologies that were once thought would vanish. When looking specifically at the process of publishing, we can see that there has been a total adaptation of those forms within the electronic sphere. There is electronic publishing; consisting of editors and publishers who execute the same tasks as those working on physical texts. With respect to electronic publishing, scholars and those who wish to self-publish material can easily do so on the Internet for much less investment. A problem arises when considering the quality of the work; it doesn’t even compare to that of print. The most celebrated magazine of the new electronic point of view is Wired which exists mostly as a conventional magazine, rather than an interactive website. (Chippindale: 1997) Again, this just goes to show that print does win in the hearts of those who still understand its beauty.

During the 1950s when television was the medium of the era, it was said that radio would become obsolete. Today, with vast technological advancements since then, we can see that radio is hardly dead. The Internet has now allowed for the distribution of world news and music through special applications that bring the wonders of radio through computer speakers. We don’t watch television while driving in our cars – we still listen to the radio. Music is still here and so is reading. The Internet and other new technologies allow us to take the best of all those worlds and bring them together. Movies can be watched implementing DVD technology through computers; television can bring you the Internet; the Internet can bring you music; the Internet can bring you electronic books and essays, yet book sales are still going strong. Universities are still assigning books as texts for their variety of courses, but also provide some Internet/correspondence courses that still require texts the majority of the time. For such large institutions that offer education to so many, books are a necessity. These unsurpassed academics know very well that books are essential to their student’s success as nothing can replace the essence of print media

Electronic media have encompassed every dynamic of human lives. Change is upon us, but that does not entail the ridding of the marvel of books. The printed word, as we have known it has been a significant phenomenon historically. We may be blinded by technology’s grip right now, but for a new medium to survive, it essentially must carry on the traditions and qualities of the medium from which it originated. The content of any new medium is an old medium. Without print, we wouldn’t have conceived the Internet and electronic versions of everything. For technology to be able to take a medium embedded in history for over 500 years and eliminate it would be catastrophic. There are too many who support and understand its beauty and benefits and wouldn’t let that happen. Although the future is uncertain, whatever new methods bring, one thing is certain – we will still be required to read, (Hills:1980) and books, magazines and newspapers will sit along side our computers.

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