SOCIAL MEDIA – ARTS2093

Key concepts for L1 - Intro into audience theory

'Chapter 1 What is social media?' --> Page, R., Unger, J., Barton, D. & Zappavigna, M. (2014). *Researching language and social media: A student guide*. London: Routledge.

Livingstone, S. (1999). New media, new audiences? New media and society,1(1), 59-66

Social media –
- Social media are networked database platforms that combine public with personal communication" (Miekle 2016, p. 6)
- Social media delivers content via a network of participants where the content can be published by anyone, but still distributed across potentially large scale audiences" (Page et al, p. 5)
- "...social media enable anyone to develop and display their creativity, to empathize with others and to find connection, communication and communion" (Miekle 2016, p. ix)
- But they "are also surveillance systems through which users become complicit in their own commercial exploitation" (p. ix)
- Internet-based sites and services that promote social interaction between participants
- content delivered via a network of participants where the content can be published by anyone and still distributed across potentially large-scale audiences
- Distinguished from other web genres in that they enable two-way communication between participants, emphasising the dialogic and collaborative potential of SM compared to mainstream media interactions
  - increased range of multimodal resources and greater media richness
  - Interactions oriented towards the exchange of information and emphasising interpersonal exchanges rather than task-based transactions
- Two-way computer-mediated communication
- Oriented towards the exchange of information
- Interpersonal
- Relational self-representation
- Rich and multimodal
- On a spectrum between synchronous and asynchronous

Audiences
- How interactions between participants can be made visible to those interacting directly with each other and wider 'overhearing' audience

- o Relationship between the speaker and audience and the public or private nature of the communication
- 'audiences' - composition and make-up
- Individual or collective – "...is the audience defined taxonomically as a group of individuals who, though they may never meet, share the common feature of watching television; or is the audience defined as a collectivity, a group of individuals who engage directly with each other about the media they view" (Livingstone, 1998, p. 212)
- Implied audience - audience as presumed, imagined or mythologized, role in the discourses surrounding new media
- A key consequence of new media technologies is the transformation of the audience itself - audiences increasingly to be understood as plural, active and both embedded in and distanced from specific contexts of use

Media effects
- what kind of impact media has on us
- Process of appropriation and domesticating a new object occurs on several time scales from days or weeks to generations
  - The time scale of technological development differs from that of social change - e.g. completed technology diffusing through the market and the lifespan of the new medium within the home
  - The shift towards convergent forms of information services as media, information and telecommunications services become interconnected is facilitated by the emergence of the more recent media as well as by both the multiplication and diversification of media
    - Blurring of key social boundaries through such convergence - trend towards democratization, making visible forms of knowledge and opinion whose domain has been traditionally restricted to higher status groups
  - The shift from one-way, mass communication towards more interactive communication between medium and user

Hypodermic needle model
- Media injects ideas into the brains of a passive audience! – 'mathematical model of communication'
- a model of communications suggesting that an intended message is directly received and wholly accepted by the receiver
- People were assumed to be "uniformly controlled by their biologically based 'instincts' and that they react more or less uniformly to whatever 'stimuli' came along"
- Vulnerable audiences - the media explores information in such a way that it injects in the mind of audiences as bullets.

Two-step flow model
- Two step theory of mass communication
- 'Opinion Leaders' mediate between the media and the audience
- "ideas often flow from radio and print to opinion leaders and from these to the less active sections of the population" (Katz, 1957)
- Opinion leader => individuals in social contact with an opinion leader
- In the 1940s, Lazarsfeld disproved the "Hypodermic Needle Model Theory" through elections studies in "The People's Choice". The study was conducted to determine voting patterns and the relationship between the media and political power. Lazarsfeld discovered that the majority of the public remained unfazed by propaganda surrounding Roosevelt's campaign. Instead, interpersonal outlets proved more influential than the media.

- Opinion leaders are categorized as individuals with the best understanding of media content and the most accessibility to the media as well. These leaders essentially take in the media's information, and explain and spread the media's messages to others
- media does not directly have an influence on viewers anymore. Instead, interpersonal connections and even selective exposure play a larger role in influencing the public in the modern age.

Influence
- Social media analytics
- How much influence do you have on your social network?
- Various social media metrics are used in marketing and other domains to assign 'scores' to users' 'influence'
- 'The million follower fallacy' (Avnit, 2009)
- "...it is more influential to have an active audience who retweets or mentions the user." (Cha, 2010, p.11)
- Influence & two-step flow theory : Wu et al. (2011) -"although audience attention is highly concentrated on a minority of elite users, much of the information they produce reaches the masses indirectly via a large population of intermediaries".

Uses & gratification model
- The audience actively seeks media that meets their needs.
- " Audiences are seen as being "selective,""involved," or in a "using" relationship to communications." (Levy & Windahl, 1984)
- Audience behaviour before, during and after media exposure
- Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, self-actualization
- Herzog's (1944) study of radio soap opera in the US - emotional release ("a good chance to cry" over someone else's problems rather that their own; wishful thinking; advice
- Reality TV - comparing the lives and mannerisms of the reality "stars" to their own

Key concepts for L2 - Intro into audience theory (part 2)

Active audiences
- 'audiencing' - audiences have agency, are themselves active, becoming an audience is a process not a static thing
- Audiences are complex systems involving **social patterns**, **communicative patterns** and the **affordances of different technologies**
- Active audience theory maintains that the meaning of a media text is negotiated by the audience; rather than consuming blindly, audiences use interpretive lenses and bring individual experiences to bear when making meaning from media (e.g. Fiske, 1989; Radway, 1984).

Reception theory
- Focus on the audience
- involve 'studying the interpretive contexts which frame and inform a viewer's understanding of the media' (Hills 2006, 93).

Encoding/decoding model
- According to Hall (1980) **social positioning** influences how media texts are interpreted by different groups
  - producing different possible 'readings' of media texts