

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MCLUHAN IN TODAY'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Introduction

It would be harder to find anyone now arguing that technology is changing our daily lives and our understanding of life than it was in the 1960s when the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan began to talk about media and its influence. “The message is the media” (McLuhan, 1964), he says, and pushes not the content, but what or whom the content affects to the top of the hierarchy of message influence. This scientist's ideas, developed before the internet and computers reached our homes, sound like prophecies of the future we live in now. McLuhan introduced new concepts such as ‘Hot and Cool Media’ (McLuhan, 1964), the ‘Global Village’ (McLuhan, 2000), the ‘Tetrad model’ and the understanding of media as ‘Extensions of man’ (McLuhan, 1964), all of which are linked to contemporary life and the interactions with other people or media that take place in it. McLuhan argues that changes in technology and media are shaping and changing our societies and the way they function. Levinson (2001) argues that McLuhan's ideas can help us understand our new digital age. This can also be seen in the current education system: McLuhan argues that the classroom we have and see now is a by-product of the press (also a media) (McLuhan, 1966). However, in today's world, the popularity of the press is being taken over by computers, the internet, digitised materials, social media - things that McLuhan, in his texts, seemed to “foreshadow” when he spoke of the ‘Global Village’ and ‘Extensions of man’. Seeing social media as a message and a new technological transformation happening, according to the example with the press, should also deform the educational system. Social media has become an everyday reality that changes many areas of life and the perception of self, and it is no longer possible to overlook or not accept (as is often the case in schools) social media in the structures of learning, because it has such a strong influence on the everyday life of pupils, and it automatically deforms the structures of interactions and thinking. This essay will try to embody McLuhan's ideas and not try to explain, but to observe how social media works in schools today and its possible impact on

the future and the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students.

Keywords: *social media, McLuhan, education system.*

Social Media – “The medium is the message”

One of the key concepts and ideas explored by McLuhan – “The medium is the message”, is an important basis for evaluating social media in education. Understanding that the medium itself is a message and carries distinctive information is essential for choosing the right educational medium and for understanding what messages a particular medium can independently convey or how it can shape our perception of life (McLuhan, 1964). As McLuhan argues, the content of each medium is itself a medium/media. These characteristics are very easy to observe in social media. In this case, social media is becoming a new “technology” that is changing the interactions between human beings. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2013), social media is defined as websites and applications/apps that allow users to create and share content or participate in social networks. This only confirms McLuhan's ideas about the ‘Global Village’ and the understanding of content as media. A closer look at the concept through McLuhan's eyes suggests that social media, although it emerged well after the author's death, fits with the idea of a game-changing technology (media) because of the impact it has already had and is still having on changing everyday life, the ability to change the pace of communication and the transmission of information (things are speeding up), and the habits of mind. We expect to receive information much more quickly, the emotions of live communication are synthesised in ‘emojis’, the creation of a sense of proximity at a distance, the promotion of anonymity and individuality through a presumed sense of community, which manifests itself in the possibility of secretly ‘meddling’ in the affairs of others. This is not the direct content of the media, but the performance of the media itself and the possibilities it offers are already changing our perception of life and our expectations of ourselves and others (e.g., the desire to get things quickly - here and now). Returning to the question of content becoming media, in the case of social media, we also have to look back to the more traditionally understood technologies: the computer and the telephone. In these technologies (as well as in others), we can observe an emerging media fractal: the internet could be seen as the content of these technologies, but it is also a media in which there are social media, which is also a media and a content, in which other media and contents interact, in a way which in itself turns it into another media. This also shows the uniqueness of social media, which seems to be an infinite fractal that contains a constant mixing

and interaction of hot and cool media: writing, language, sound, image, internet, browsers, different technologies, and a variety of other social media. These processes encourage the engagement of the assumed, synthesised senses and thus involve them in the simulations of life. Here we can already speak of questions of the reality of 'reality' and recall Baudrillard (1981), who argued that images of reality can overshadow reality itself. The space of communication is changing, which has its own obstacles and/or advantages for interpersonal communication and the transmission of the message, i.e., it forms its own message.

The impact of social media on education

The pace of information transfer is also changing – everything is getting faster. Users scan content quickly for a quick result (Carr, 2011). This pace of information 'consumption' is not driven by the content itself, but by the medium - the technology or page/app. It also affects students' ability to accept or reject information and to critically evaluate it within the school. While everyday life is already dominated by the 'Global Village' (as described by McLuhan – 'the integration of the nervous system into the world' (McLuhan, 2000)), which connects people to the wider social world through social media and promotes the speed of information sharing - school is stuck with old media that cannot catch up with the speed of the new. The speed of social media also poses certain challenges that require teachers to acquire new competences and to teach their students not only the content, but also how to operate in the new media and what messages the media itself conveys. The available speed comes at a cost of the accuracy and reliability of the information provided online (Cooper, 2020), which also poses a challenge for the education system. The rapid, 'here and now' consumption of text provided by the internet and social media reduces the ability to critically analyse information (Carr, 2011); media not only conveys information but also shapes thought processes. In this case, education systems do not provide the necessary competences to participate in today's complex media world, which requires the ability to select and understand not only the content of the media but also the media itself and its impact on society and the individual. Although McLuhan was positive about the idea of a 'Global Village', one of his students pointed out that the philosopher would be concerned about the faster-than-the-speed-of-light overcommunicating without depth and understanding (Cooper, 2020). Thus, looking at social media in education through McLuhanian lens, the school is at a crossroad - how and whether to incorporate social media, knowing the dangers McLuhan predicted, and how to teach the young person to critically

evaluate the social media that have become inevitable, and the specific messages they carry, as well as the ability to shape the message independently of the content.

As mentioned earlier, social media is nowadays inevitable in academic environments: from sharing learning materials, informal and formal communication (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, GoogleClassroom), to delivering lessons in social media environments (e.g. Google Meets, Teams) and information-seeking or unconsciously receiving information in text, video, audio and other forms (Google, GoogleScholar, Wikipedia, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Youtube, Blogs, Snapchat, Pinterest, etc.). One of the key aims of using social media in education is to help students achieve their learning objectives and develop the necessary competences as effectively as possible (Hitchcock, 2013). Social media used for educational purposes are not inherently bad, and they are also in line with the positive aspects of the Global Village, but the importance of discussing ethical norms and promoting the aforementioned critical thinking of students by drawing attention to the influence of the media itself on their thought processes and interaction with their environment increases. Social media also help to sort and classify information (hashtags [#]), facilitate and speed up communication processes, change the rules of communication (the ability to reply or not), and become a space of communication and knowledge exchange that dictates very distinct rules that change the way people interact, both on social media itself and in real life (Robbins & Singer, 2014). These media are close and familiar 'spaces' for students (more than 90% of college students use Facebook (Harvard Institute of Politics, 2011)), and being able to engage and make good use of it could help the learning process.

In assessing the ability of schools and teachers to use media, it is worth recalling McLuhan's observation, which was not directed at social media, but in the current context seems to refer to this – treating media other than books as a secondary (McLuhan, 1966). Although 'secondary' media have for a long time provided much more information that sensitizes more senses and becomes more memorable. This exclusion of other media reflects the backwardness of schools and their inability to respond to the needs and lives of people today (Klibavičius, 2013). McLuhan stressed the need for a deeper and more attentive reflection and analysis of media cultures - what we might now call media literacy. This highlights the need to use 'cool' media when working with students to promote their engagement and critical thinking, which could be helped by social media that also allows the creation of new media by commenting on the content that has already become media and so on. This encourages students' engagement and tries to avoid

passive observation by using technology that in other way would allow this – e.g. the computer. This example once again demonstrates the importance of the media message. The school is powerless to withstand the invasion of media (Marchand, 1989), so reflection is a necessity. In particular, the speed of social media, which intensively stimulates the different senses, provides instant feedback and becomes a space for aural, textual, and visual communication. This virtual learning environment encourages a shift from linear thinking to simultaneous perception (Klibavičius, 2013) - which means that media change our thinking structures.

“Extensions of man” and social media

However, by changing the structures of thinking, social media in education also embodies another of McLuhan's ideas - media as an extension of man (1964). This author saw language itself, as a medium, as an extension of man, through which “man distances himself from wider reality”. Drawing on Bergson's ideas, he argued that “language weakens man's collective consciousness or intuitive perception”, but accelerates the processes of sociality, of the transmission of information, dramatically engaging all the senses, but distracting man from the bliss of the collective unconscious (1964). Although the discussion is about language, the same idea can be applied to social media, which are even more complex and create a new metalanguage in which different linguistic expressions interact, becoming a kind of continuation of the human being. How does this potentially influence interpersonal relations? How it affects the teacher-student relationship, when this new medium (e.g. Google) has more content, and its messages and information transfer processes are more productive (though not assuredly accurate)? And if language itself distances people from the collective consciousness, what is the impact of social media? What is the role of the teacher in this media? And while the main purpose of language as an extension of the human being is to find a compromise and to be social, the abyss that is being created can increase with each more complex step of the media.

Comparing social media to texts, the social media seem to solve the problem of texts (to be defended by other texts, and those by others, etc.), as they can provide a sense of live conversation (e.g., Messenger, WhatsApp, Facebook), but the mere fact that it is a separate space that combines together image, sound and text, and the ability to share information, shows the features of separateness and independence - a distinct meta-level of sociality (Klibavičius, 2013). Social media such as Twitter, Youtube, Facebook seem to recreate a sense of tribe, habits of communication,

Tinder, Facebook and Instagram act as chronicles, collect memories, and create online communities. But all this seems to take place in a different “space”, where the rules are dictated by the medium itself. It has already been mentioned that a large part of students’ lives also take place on social media, where images are not only being embellished, but also new lives or images are being created. Without all this being incorporated into school life, schools remain a ‘secondary media’, disconnected and distant from the other ‘real’ online social media life. The apparent creation of an educational community through social media can also be seen in the Covid-19 period when all education moved to social media. However, this did not create a more fully effective way of learning, but rather the opposite, creating an even greater emotional distance between those involved in the learning process. Social media and technology have become an extension of language, another medium, rather than an extension of a human being, thus adding another step away from the collective consciousness. Observing such an expression, we can also see the sequence created by language, which distances life and meanings from the human being as an entity - this makes the exchange of information even faster, but the abyss between the human ‘essence’ and the information it expresses or receives only widens. In education, this brings us back to the crossroads of how not to lose touch with the pupil to help him or her assimilate information, by including social media in the process, which is an inseparable continuation of life, influencing our processes of thinking and communicating and dictating the spaces and conditions of action that are often become into a “more real life” thanks to the possibility of creating it there, as if in a new meta-level.

However, there are also those who support the first idea that social media connects rather than separates, and in the educational context, using a variety of different effects (audio, visual, tactile), it “has an increasingly intense sensory stimulation effect on the learners” (Klibavičius, 2013). For instance, Teams, Googlemeets, or Zoom simulate real socialisation and educational processes, but are not yet able to engage all senses. It is like a synthesised environment that creates a simulacrum of social interaction, but does not provide the real human contact effect that attracts attention. And while social networks can still be seen as extensions of the psyche that seem to promote collective dialogue and provide access to mass information sources, they complicate and distort the understanding of each other and the rules of live communication (Klibavičius, 2013), and further distance them from the Bergsonian state of “non-speechlessness” that brings harmony and peace (McLuhan, 1964).

Possibilities

Looking at the future of social media in education through McLuhan's eyes, we can discuss the expanding meaning of the concept of social media. Observing the tendencies in the world, we can speculate about the move of education into meta-worlds. At the same time, however, the question should be asked: what is the point? And what could this process bring to education that it does not already have? What would these social media take from those that already exist and what message and information filter would it provide? It is also possible to move completely to online teaching, but the examples we have had during the Covid period have shown that the weight of the message of social media and technology itself (the relationship between the two should be the subject of a separate essay) creates the abyss between student and teacher that has already been mentioned, changes the relationship and we have not yet learned how to live with this change. The question of what to do with the inevitability of social media still exists. Although there are many advantages to social media: it allows fast and efficient sharing of materials, reporting, receiving, finding large amounts of information from the comfort of one's own home, teaching and learning from anywhere in the world while still keeping in touch. However, it cannot be denied that communication, and perhaps the need of its forms, will change over time and that this can and already had been heavily influenced by media, especially social media, which are changing the spaces of communication (media) and the way we perceive and process the self, the other, and the communication and sharing of information (education) processes. And although we are already talking about AI teaching (which can also be partly attributed to social media) I believe that it is the presence of media being not directly the continuum of the human being, but the continuum of another medium or several "traditional" media creates the aforementioned "abyss" of communication between human beings. And it is precisely the lack of connection that technology and media still cannot fully grasp, that is preventing a complete shift towards teaching and communication only in social media or in meta worlds.

Conclusions

Social media is an integral part of the functioning and socialization of society, not only containing the content but also actively participating in change with its messages that shape the change in our minds. Social media has become our everyday life tool and the learner's environment in which he/she wants to operate, making the old educational practices rejectable and

incomprehensible (McLuhan, 1969). However, the specificity of social media, the exclusion of social media in school, as well as the passive or negative attitudes towards the incorporation of these media in everyday life, create a void in the teaching relationship. Teachers' synthetic engagement with social media also often creates alienation and maintains a 'rear-view mirror' situation, as the teaching system is not run by the students themselves. And while social media are their own "community" of individuals that allows interactive and alleged participation in (or rather secret observation of) the lives of others, their use in the education system needs to be well thought out and evaluated, by discussing it with the users themselves and by changing the role of the teacher into a facilitator - who points the direction and teaches to observe the consequences and the impact, rather than explaining the reality that is currently available (thanks to the advent of the written word and the Internet) in the same medium in which the social media exist. Technological advances reveal the versatility, multifunctionality, and complexity of new media – for example, a smartphone combines the functions of a call, a web browser, email, a music player, and a photo or video camera (Klibavičius, 2013). Due to the influence of media, today's students ('digital natives') see and understand their environment differently, solve and understand problems differently, and therefore expect a similar environment (social media) in the classroom. In today's school, it is important not only to provide the knowledge but also to teach how to act in the media, how to search and select information, ethical issues, boundary making, communication, critical thinking, observing not only the content of the media but also the messages they produce.

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