The Power and Politics of Media and Information Literacy

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Synopsis

We are living in a media-saturated world. Not only we receive information, we have become prosumers and are able to communicate with the 'world.' This has been widely reflected in the academic texts. But is there a dark side to this 'age of information freedom?' My argument in this paper is that although we have gotten rid of one sort of tyranny and can more freely speak up, a more suppressive and widespread process of control and surveillance is underway. Worse than that, we the users seem to be comfort with that.

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A New Age of Freedom?

Most scholars perceive media and information literacy as a decontextualized or depoliticized concept. Regardless of the assumptions on which the definitions and articulations are based on, they merely attempt to study the dimensions or effects of such a problematic concept. Hence, by replicating such superficial approaches to media and information literacy, they neglect the crucial role of actors in power, specifically the chronological role of the global mass media in matters such as spreading political propaganda or suppressing the cultural expression of the "others". This paper argues that the notion of media and information literacy, both in terms of its advent circumstances during the Cold War and its theoretical illustrations and operational applications, increases the potential to develop economic inequality and political hegemony both locally and globally. The ideological articulation of the consequent notions such as misinformation, disinformation, and fake news pursues colonial, racist, or xenophobic intentions and unfolds a new path to post-colonial strategies like perception and cognition management.

No doubt, the way colonization works has dramatically changed with the advent of internet technologies. A naïve view can be that the oppressed now have voice on Twitter and they will no longer remain silent victims. Yet very few understand that the new colonization takes place elsewhere. In our media saturated world, the one who rules the world is the one who knows what happens in the world. No longer many infiltrators should jeopardize their lives to get sensitive information about so-called 'enemy' states. Of course, this kind of information is still needed, yet the powerful countries have another way of gathering precise and effective data: the social media. In the realm of social media, there is no sovereignty. Governments see the data from their courtiers go abroad, and they can do nothing about it. Again, a naïve spectator might start boasting about freedom of information etc., but a wiser historian can see a sinister process underway to colonize the new world.

A media literacy approach that is 'out of the box' and has a scrutiny on what really goes un in our abstract layer of communication and data processing can help people understand their tiny and valueless track data can become one of the most valuable assets when amassed to millions, and then employed as a weapon to colonize and destroy the same people. Maybe we the citizens of the world can start by opting out when asked about if we want cookies to track us down.

Further readings

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