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Media, Culture, and Identity

Field Investigation

Zeynep Tufekci’s talk on ‘Democracy in the Age of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube’ was held in Camp Concert Hall on February 13th. She discussed the extent to which the internet has influenced our lives and how we see content. Tufekci provided examples of the ways that these websites filter what comes up on our screens and how we have less control over our content than we believe. She also explained the extent to which our peers affect the manner that we “choose” to spend our time on social media, suggesting that we have a strong tendency to follow our friends’ actions.

The talk focused on a form of media that has the ability to provide us with different ways of seeing and interpreting what is going on in the world. Social media is generally used as a tool to share our thoughts on current events or things that are happening in our lives. This creates a culture where people can go online and make a profile that embodies their beliefs often while using other people’s posts as jumping off points. The term ‘culture’ can be defined as, “the structure set or pattern of behaviors, beliefs, traditions, symbols, and practices by means of which humans perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life”.[[1]](#footnote-0) Social media provides a welcoming culture in the sense that anyone can share their thoughts. Both individual and collective identities are formed through the content that we share on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. There are also pages where groups hold discussions and voice their opinions on topics that they feel strongly about.

In class, we discussed the keyword ‘censorship’, which is defined as, “the restriction, suppression, or prohibition of forms of speech and media content deemed to be contrary to the common good”.[[2]](#footnote-1) Tufekci explained how social media platforms monitor our feeds, censoring the content that is circulating online. One example that she provided was when the events of Ferguson were unfolding, her Twitter feed emphasized Ferguson but her Facebook feed emphasized the ALS ice bucket challenge, with no connect to Ferguson. Facebook ‘censored’ discussions on Ferguson because Facebook believed that Tufekci would find posts about the ice bucket challenge more enticing.

The concept of censorship can also be applied to the movie that we watched for homework, titled “This Film is not Yet Rated.” The movie exposes the MPAA for censoring content that does not follow the guidelines of what they deem as ‘normal’. The MPAA structures their rating system in a way that censors the audience from viewing more abstract scenes. Some of these restrictions include shooting sex scenes at a certain camera angle and in a certain position, limiting the amount of homogenous sex scenes, and controlling who gets to experience pleasure. The cautions that the MPAA takes when reviewing movies could cause more harm than damage, as viewers who are considered ‘different’ might feel alienated because of a lack of variety in what is seen on screen.

Bibliography

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1. Yúdice, George. "Culture." *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, Second Edition. Eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler. New York: New York University Press, 2014. 68. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Ouellette, Laurie, and Jonathan Gray, eds. *Keywords for Media Studies*. New York: NYU Press, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gk08zz>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)