

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The New Media

Technology advances at breakneck pace, and the past 30 years or so have seen us in the middle of what is usually referred to as the “digital revolution”. This “revolution” has transformed the information and communication infrastructure of society and has spawned emerging themes and subjects of study: virtual society, information society, knowledge economy, etc. The term “new media” is a product of this development.

“New media” is commonly used to refer to electronic forms of communication that include telephone and digital data integration; CD-ROM and DVD media; streaming audio and video; websites; email; online communities; mobile devices; and podcasting – all of which are made possible through digital technology and connote interactivity and hyperactivity. The term is used in relation or in contrast to “old media” which refers to the mainly static text and graphic forms of communication. But with old media being re-packaged into new media formats, and with producers of old media also designing content for new media audiences, the distinction blurs and the dichotomy seems false.

All forms of technology serve as tools for some specific activities. In the case of new media, they serve to facilitate fast and easy exchange of information and expression of feelings and opinions. With the new media, we can communicate and get information we desire and need, wherever we are and whenever we please. But while they bring with them new benefits and opportunities, there are likewise adverse effects and threats on individuals and communities. Many writers of modernity fear that the new technologies have resulted in ever decreasing personal interactions. Because the new media and communication technologies allow for greater flexibility and mobility, individuals spend more and more time away from home, and rely on the technology to keep them connected. Individuals become part of many diffuse social networks, some of which are far away from home, others even virtual. Further, with many media stimuli competing for attention, there is loss of engagement and instead, what remains is shallow and distracted presence. In effect, the

rapid technological change has also given rise to concerns relating to the political, social, cultural, and psychological consequences of the new technologies.

And while the new media destroy boundaries, they also reinforce those that already exist, and even create new ones. The so-called “digital divide” is a result of differential access to new technology, owing to socio-economic factors, language, and content. The digital divide is generally seen as yet another expression of the old issue between the “haves” and the “have nots”. More recently, this has also included the issue of who actually benefits from new technology. Thus, it also begs looking into the skills of those who have access and how these skills are being used. Additionally, the content – which refers to the features, information, and services available – becomes an important consideration, as the creation and production of local content in the new media are seen as another way to bridge the digital divide.

But differential access notwithstanding, the ubiquity of the new media has made it difficult to simply ignore them and think that their presence is just temporary. They are brought to our personal spaces through work, school, the media, the social environment, and the community. This has resulted in different ways of appropriating and finding accommodation with the new media. There are different contexts in which new media are used. People in different positions and different situations use new media as they see fit or as warranted by their life situations. In the process, previously unimagined uses and new meanings emerge. As more and more people find the need to engage directly with new media, it becomes imperative to determine how the challenges of the new media are met. To this end, the new media and communication technologies constitute rich, albeit complex subjects of study for media and communication research.

The five articles in this issue underscore the expansive possibilities in studying new media. They discuss how specific forms of new communication and media technologies relate to how people identify themselves in reconfigured workplaces, define their personal distances in the virtual realm, link themselves to larger

society, establish religious communities, and negotiate new conceptions of intellectual property. The articles explain how we are redefining ourselves and our activities at the interpersonal, the organizational, and the national levels with our interactions with new media.

Telephony as a border-crossing technology is not a new medium *per se*, but the deregulation of international and national telecommunications systems have resulted in a networked society where telephone calls across farther distances can be cheaper than those made within more proximate surroundings. Coupled with the dual world economy, these developments in telecommunications have given birth to a new global outsourcing of telephony-based services such as call centers. The Philippines, with its stock of citizens who are fluent in English, has since become a major player in this industry, the workers of which work within the country but communicate with people elsewhere in the planet.

Princess Diane Dagohoy, in her article “Call Centers and the Modern Individual”, explores how these workers in the call center industry appreciate the transnational and cross-cultural nature of their occupation. In the process of working across time zones and dealing with people who are different from them, call center workers, Dagohoy argues, become individuals with a “plural sense of self (that enable them) to adjust and adapt to the differentiations, dynamics and ambivalence of modernity”. By grounding a global development at the level of the personal, Dagohoy cogently highlights the agency of individuals given the conditions of modernity.

The concept of adaptation that Dagohoy explores in her article is also at the heart of “So Close: Measuring Social Distance in Online Relationships” by Dolorosa Pasia and Ritta Diane Ramos. Visiting five decades of measures for social distance, the two authors develop an empirically-grounded instrument that can be used to locate people of various demographic characteristics relative to online activities. In doing so, Pasia and Ramos discover that virtual spaces are far from egalitarian as heterosexual, younger,

and spatially proximate people are held more closely by individuals in cyberspace compared to their counterparts. Thus, in the process of adapting the concept of social distance to online activities, Pasia and Ramos indicate that people have perhaps adopted real life comfort zones in navigating virtual spaces.

In their conclusion, Pasia and Ramos wondered whether some groups – homosexual women, for instance – are being disadvantaged by the relatively bigger social distance that online participants maintain with them. Do online transactions simply mirror, or do they strengthen, the marginalization of sectors that are already in the peripheries of mainstream society?

The concern about the future of marginalized groups in our increasingly networked society is recurrent in the discourse on new media. Do new communication technologies link socially-distanced sectors as much as they bridge spatial distances? In her article “Connecting Indigenous Peoples: Mobile Phone Experiences of Three Indigenous Peoples Groups in the Philippines”, Lourdes Portus explores how three indigenous peoples (IPs)– the Dumagats, the Aytas, and the Sama-Tausugs – are slowly adopting mobile phones to access government services. Because access to mobile phones is still limited due to the IPs’ remote geographical location and poor purchasing power, the few units in their area bring prestige to their owners and serve as a community tool. Mobile phones thus connect people with others, within and beyond the IPs’ villages.

Ma. Criselda Badilla’s article “The Word to the World: An Analysis of Websites of Five Philippine-Based Catholic Communities”, also explores the idea of connections that are facilitated by new media. Through a textual analysis of their websites, Badilla explores how religious groups use various design elements such as text, lay-out, graphics, page length, color, animation, interactivity, and navigational tools to connect their members not only to each other, but also to the organizational vision, culture, and charism. She discovers that religious organizations have been successful in harnessing various online features to define a Web presence that echoes their established

organizational identity. Badilla situates her arguments in both theory and praxis. She explores the theoretical value of her research using assertions about agenda-setting and organizational culture. At the same time, she explains the practical value of religious websites. Beyond the online articulation of their identity, Gatchalian-Badilla argues, websites are a lifeline for religious groups inasmuch as “the emergence of global villages and e-communities will heavily shape an individual’s faith experiences in a few years’ time.”

While Badilla implies that the influence of new media on religiosity is incipient, Christine Leones and Myra Lloredo, in their article “Critical Review of Philippine Copyright System vis-à-vis Access to Information and New Media Technology”, argue that it is already being strongly felt in legislative circles. They explore how the Philippine copyright system promotes or precludes access to new information and communication technologies. In doing so, they raise personal issues of access to the level of national discourse.

The articles in this issue approach the topic of new media through various methods. Dagohoy, Portus, Pasia, and Ramos conducted interviews and focus group discussions, while Badilla used textual analysis. Pasia and Ramos also conducted a survey, while Leones and Lloredo performed a close reading of the concept of intellectual property. The richness of methods in these five articles shows the utility of established methods in the study of new media as much as it indicates the possibility of developing innovative data-gathering techniques such as Pasia and Ramos’ instrument for measuring social distance in online relationships.

The diversity of the topics that can be studied with the emergence of new media is also indicated by the five articles. Yet, the sheer variety of subjects for research on new media means the articles represent just a tiny fraction of what can still be studied. Future research can explore how our interactions with and through online and mobile communications technologies (the Internet, mobile telephony, PDAs, and games) are reshaping the way we study, work, conduct business, participate in government, socialize

with each other, and amuse ourselves. Likewise, other studies can look at how these interactions raise new personal and societal issues even as they help us negotiate our changing political economy and address emerging concerns about our urbanizing landscapes, converging media, and increasingly young, migrant, and transnational population.

In line with the focus on new media, this issue contains Almond Aguila's interview of Paolo Pineda of ABS-CBN Interactive, a major player in emerging technologies in the country. Also in this issue is a book review by Sakari Taipale of Raul Pertierra's "Transforming Technologies: Altered Selves – Mobile Phone and Internet Use in the Philippines". Fernando Austria Jr., meanwhile, reviews "Mass Communication Ethics: A Primer" by Andres Sevilla. The primer discusses ethical concerns and principles "to aid those who hold power in both the public and private sectors so that they can ensure that ICTs [information and communication technologies] serve the best interest of each person." The issue also contains a compilation, prepared by Violeda Umali, of the abstracts of theses and dissertations that relate to new media for the year 2004.

This issue includes the U.P. Gawad Plaridel Lectures of Fidela "Tiya Dely" Magpayo and Cecilia "Che-che" Lazaro, awardees for 2005 and 2006, respectively. Magpayo talks about her experiences in Philippine radio and explains how students can succeed in it the same way that she has. Lazaro, meanwhile, discusses the challenges which the changing media landscape poses to educators and practitioners.

Finally, as issue editors, we wish to thank the people without whose scholarship, industry, and diligence, this issue would not have been possible: the contributors of articles and reviews; the reviewers; Prof. Danilo Arao, Ms. Berinice Zamora, and Ms. Lynette Quintillan of the Office of Research and Publication (ORP) of the U.P. College of Mass Communication; and the *Plaridel* Editorial Board headed by Dean Elena E. Pernia. *Maraming salamat*

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