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WHEN HUMANITY MEETS TECHNOLOGY:
CONTEMPLATING NEIL POSTMAN'S CRITIQUE OF ADVERTISING

A Dissertation

Submitted to McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Yingwen Wang

May 2019

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2019

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ABSTRACT

WHEN HUMANITY MEETS TECHNOLOGY: CONTEMPLATING NEIL POSTMAN'S CRITIQUE OF ADVERTISING

By

Yingwen Wang

May 2019

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Calvin L. Troup, Ph.D.

This project aims to contemplate Postman's critique of advertising and offer insights to understand Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in today's mediated environment. As an essential component of IMC, the history of advertising demonstrates and documents that the medium of communication has an extensive influence on IMC practices. The concern about how communication media affect human perception, understanding, and behavior, resides within the central claim of the study of media ecology. Thus, this project investigates IMC through the lens of Postman's media ecology perspectives, and argues that Postman's prescient ideas provide both hope and constructive insights. Moreover, Postman's thermostatic perspective, rooted in media ecology, offers a functional and creative approach to understanding IMC and seeking improvement of IMC practices in today's mediated environment.

DEDICATION

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A Ph.D. is a lonely journey, but I am so grateful that there are people in my life who have helped me go through this journey.

I am grateful to have you, Dr. Calvin L. Troup, as my advisor. Through the years, you have always been so encouraging, patient, and helpful. Thank you for believing me and going through this journey with me. I could not have finished this project without your instruction. I am proud of being your student.

I am grateful to have you, Dr. Janie H. Fritz and Dr. Richard Thames, as my committee members. Thanks for always being supportive and caring for me. You are great inspirations for my pursuit of academic excellence.

I am grateful to the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies. I appreciate the immense attentiveness, care and support that I have got from all the professors and staffs.

I am grateful to have you, Dr. Amanda Sevilla, as my best friend and comrade. It is so precious to have someone always be there with you and for you.

I am grateful to my parents, Guobao Wang and Baomin Wang, who give me unconditional love and support of whatever I decide to do. You give me freedom and confidence in living the life I want.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to myself for not giving up.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Initial Research Question

Known as a cultural critic and an educator, Neil Postman wrote with an extensive interest in the studies of technology and humanity. Although his works were written over twenty years ago in the United States, we still find them applicable to many of today's situations not only in the U.S., but globally. As Ellen Rose comments, "Postmanist" research makes great contributions to human understanding and decency and helps improve social life (31-41). Postman is prescient, as his arguments are not developed only from contingencies, but grounded in understanding the nature of human conditions and the essence of human communication.

By standing on the shoulders of giants, we are equipped with better perspectives to look into the current issues. Most existing literatures about Postman are concerned with media and technology, technology and culture, or education. There is little literature that associates Postman to the study of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). However, this project begins with the finding that advertising appears as an important metaphor in Postman's arguments addressing technology, culture, and education in his various collections of books, essays, interviews and talks.

There is no doubt that modern advertising has been pervasive and influential in our daily lives. Not only does it affect our purchasing decisions, but it also has an impact on our ascetics and values. It has become an essential and common component of IMC practices. Twenty years ago, it was still hard to imagine shopping from a mobile phone; today, the smartphone has extensive applications and influence over all kinds of IMC

practices including advertising. The smartphone makes marketing and purchasing happen without words, without face-to-face encounters. The rapid development of technology, especially the technology of communication media, propels tremendous changes in IMC practices.

This project aims to address the question: How does Neil Postman's critique of advertising provide insights to help us better understand IMC and inform better IMC practices in today's mediated environment? The purpose of this project is to make contributions to the study of human communication, especially mediated communication, from Postman's media ecology perspectives. It is written in attempt to walk the humanities into the marketplace and initiate new perspectives within the study of human communication.

Scholarship on Related Concepts

Advertising

Terry O'Reilly and Mike Tennant in *The Age of Persuasion* suggest that advertising possibly comes from the word "advertere," meaning to bring a product or service to the public's attention, often through paid announcement or commercials (xiv). John Calfee's arguments about three great truths about advertising sum up the common understanding and discussion about advertising in both academic and vernacular fields. He says that (1) "advertising always seeks to persuade, and everyone knows it"; (2) advertising is a tool for communicating information and shaping markets; and (3) advertising is always under attack by politicians, scholars and business people (Calfee 1-2). Advertising as a persuasive practice in the marketplace has long been a central topic

in communication scholarship (Harvey; O'Toole; O'Reilly and Tennant; Hackley; Essex; Ghose).

Communication scholarship has been devoted to the study of advertising as a cultural and social phenomenon. As Gillian Dyer in *Advertising as Communication* indicates, the real impact of advertising is revealed in the cultural climate of society (79). Neil O'Boyle discusses advertising as a system that delivers cultural symbolism (86). Katherine Toland Frith and Barbara Mueller also contend that advertising is able to reflect and shape a particular culture and its value system (28-51). Roland Berman claims that advertising provides individuals with many social relationships, and it also suggests ways of dealing with those relationships (13). Berman contends that advertising is a symbol of social change and gives us information about living that life in conditions of incessant change (13).

However, advertising's cultural effects are always under criticism. Early in the 1930s, Frank Raymond Leavis and Denys Thompson in *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* attributed advertising to evoking cheap and almost mechanical emotional responses, and inculcating "the choosing of the most immediate pleasures got with the least effort" (3). Their discussion shows that advertisements corrupt human feelings, debase language, exploit people's emotional needs and fears, and encourage greed, snobbery and social conformity (3). What is worse, advertising makes the numbing effect on people's critical response to their environment (Leavis and Thompson 80). Fred Inglis in *The Imagery of Power: A Critique of Advertising* further point out that advertising provokes a distortion in symbols and establishes meanings like love or warmth or friendship or, indeed, success and possession (114).

There is extensive scholarship concerning advertising's influence on human capabilities. Chris Hackly addresses advertising as a persuasive argument working at a cognitive level to influence people's perception, memory and attitude (60). Dyer raises questions about the suffusion of the language and values of advertising in modern societies as intertwining of "sales talk" and genuine communication (79). The consequence is some "values such as love, friendship, neighborliness, pleasure, happiness and sexual attraction are the staple diet of advertisements and are often confused with or transferred to the possession of things" (Dyer 79).

A utilitarian perspective is widely embraced by many scholars and practitioners who start to study advertising as a particular science. As Rosser Reeves claims, the purpose of advertising is to sell. Thus, advertising has a functional purpose that it not only provides information, but also is concerned about complete communication with the public (121). Claude Hopkins proposes in *Scientific Advertising* that there are universal principles and technic in advertising (15). Hopkins comes up with the idea that advertising is salesmanship, which has been influential in marketing practices for a long time (19). John E. O'Toole considers Hopkins's work as among the first to liken advertising to personal selling with persuasion. Prior to Hopkins and his boss, Albert Lasker, advertising was simply "keeping your name before the public" (Hopkins, *Scientific* 8). According to O'Toole, Hopkins together with Lasker and John E. Kennedy construct a concept of modern advertising that has changed the nature of the craft (81). Advertising pioneer David Ogilvy proposes another school of thought, considering advertising as a medium of information. The most important task of advertising, according to Ogilvy, is to provide useful information to consumers (7). Advertisements

should contribute to the brand image and provide valuable knowledge to people (Ogilvy 14).

The debate over advertising is still popular in today's academic arena varying from media study, communication study, and rhetorical study. There are constant voices criticizing advertising more as a rhetorical tool involved in the manipulation of social values and attitudes, rather than providing essential information about goods and services (Dyer 2). Communication scholars such as Gerard Tellis and Tim Ambler believe that advertising seeks to change consumer attitudes, beliefs, or behavior (4). Arthur Judson Brewster and Herbert Hall Palmer view advertising as purchased publicity that is directed according to a definite plan to influence people to act or to think as the advertiser desires (9). Advertising is less concerned with the communication of essential information about goods and services, and is intended to provide deficient and suspect information to create desire. Moreover, the advertising industry fosters a materialistic culture by making people believe in possession and consumption. Postman also expresses such concern about how advertising could bring a psychological effect, making people believe everything has a solution in technology or technological achievements.

The defending voices suggest that advertisements are not only economically necessary but have benefited human society. In a society like ours, advertising is believed to help people make rational choices by providing publicity for and information about products, which is required by a modern marketplace. Advertising helps raise people's standard of living by encouraging the sale of mass-produced goods, thus stimulating production and creating employment and prosperity. Advertising makes a contribution to the well being of a society in various ways. However, Postman doubts whether

advertising helps people make rational choices, or instead infuses a “pseudo-therapy” on consumers (*Amusing* 128).

Postman's Rhetorical Inquiry of Advertising

Advertising, in Postman's understanding, is the most peculiar and persuasive form of communication that imposes significant influence on public discourse and people's habits of thinking (*Amusing* 126). Postman's inquiry of advertising reflects a rhetorical perspective, in which the five canons of rhetoric - invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery - are addressed. Postman believes that the original intention of advertising was to be informative. Postman views advertising as an enterprise intended to deliver messages through rational arrangements. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman says in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, advertising was still understood as consisting of words, and was regarded as “an essential, serious and rational enterprise whose purpose is to convey information and make claims” (59-60). The invention of advertising was to appeal to human reason and understanding.

However, with the development of technology, language used in advertising is no longer created, organized and arranged in a meaningful and rational way. He believes how people use language reflects their habits of thought, as language is not only words, but thoughts as well. Postman extends his rhetorical inquiry of advertising further in *Technopoly*, where he points out that the “indiscriminate context” in advertising leads to “the journey to meaninglessness of symbols” (167). Postman criticizes “the great symbol drain,” when tradition is attacked by new ideologies that are facilitated by new

technologies, and the overload of advertising makes cultural symbols lose their significance and dignity that are embedded within tradition (*Technopoly* 166-180).

Postman argues that advertising is most effective when it is in the most irrational form and style. Media change alters the genre and form of advertising, as well as the content of advertising. Postman believes that form and content are closely related. A particular medium can only sustain a particular type of idea, and a particular type of idea can only be communicated through a particular medium. Postman draws a sharp contrast between the age of typography and the age of television, and he argues that the content and meaning of public discourse has shifted completely with the transition of communication media.

The age of typography encourages forms of public discourse with serious and logically ordered content; while in the age of television, public discourse is segmented, fragmented and without essential seriousness (*Amusing* 100). Advertising, delivered by television in the modern age, provides interrupted, inconsistent, irrational messages far away from rationality. When advertisers no longer assume that reason was the best instrument for the communication of commercial products and ideas, advertising becomes “one part depth psychology, one part aesthetic theory” (*Technopoly* 169).

Word-of-mouth was believed to be the origin form of advertising, when human communication was primarily oral, and when language was the main communication medium. Brewster and Palmer contend that word-of-mouth advertising emerged as soon as people desired to barter with each other in the early marketplace (4). In early Hebrew, Greek and Roman civilizations, advertising was a form of spoken publicity when people

wanted to proclaim news of articles for sale or current happenings (Brewster and Palmer 4).

The media shift from oral to written drove a vital transition in advertising. Evidence of outdoor advertising, such as tradesmen's signs and tavern signs, emerged in the early civilizations of Egypt, Greece and Rome, when literacy was primarily acquired from typographic resources. The industrial revolution brought evolutionary changes in media that had an effect on every aspect of human communication. Advertisements appeared not only in word-based media such as newspapers and magazines, but also image-based media such as television.

Advertising evolved to its modern stage in the late nineteenth century, and became a fast growing and profitable industry in the marketplace. However, Postman holds a pessimistic attitude towards the prosperity of the advertising industry. He argues that advertising in its modern mode becomes more and more distant from rationality, a concept to which advertising was closely connected in history back in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Into the twentieth century, Marshall McLuhan proposes, "all advertising advertises advertising" (*Probes* 145). McLuhan questions advertising, and poses his concerns about the confusion and blurriness between the means and the end of advertising. McLuhan is concerned that the end of advertising gradually becomes a substitute for the product; subsequently, the product loses its original significance. Postman shows a similar attitude towards modern advertising, as he thinks the purpose of advertising in the modern stage has deviated from the original purpose.

The problem of advertising, as Postman understands, is the deviation of focus. Advertising no longer concerns about the true character of the products, but the character of the consumers; and marketers care more about what is wrong about the consumer than what is right about the products (*Technopoly* 170). The deviation to rationality and reason in public discourse was showcased in the history of newspaper advertising in America. Postman provokes that the descent of newspaper advertising illustrated the descent of typographic minds, “beginning with reason but ending with entertainment” (*Amusing* 58).

Postman argues that the biases of media are to be blamed for the decadence of advertising. Because of the way a medium directs us to organize our minds and integrate our experience, it imposes itself on our consciousness and social institutions in myriad forms, and implies the ways we define and regulate our idea of truths (Postman, *Amusing* 18). Each medium makes a new mode of discourse possible by providing a new structure of thoughts and expressions. Phonetic writing carries out a certain kind of knowledge and requires a certain level of response. Typography illustrates an epistemology of a rational mind. Under the governance of the printing press and television, there is a drastic change in public discourse. Thus, ads on newspaper differ from ads on television, because words and images have different functions, and work at different levels, and require different modes of response (*Amusing* 74).

Media and Technology

As Berman suggests in *Advertising and Social Change*, technology must be communicated, and the role of advertising is to mediate technology and the marketplace (18). Postman’s focus on technology is not about technology as an invention or a

machine, but as a medium that mediates the communicative environment where human beings interact with each other and with technologies as well. Communication media, from spoken language, to writing, to television, to computer, are technologies that have significantly changed human communication, including advertising.

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman compares the technology and medium with the metaphor of brain and mind, suggesting that while a technology is nothing more than a machine, a medium is the social and intellectual environment created by the machine as it is combined with a code or symbol system (84). Postman's understanding of technology is echoed in the idea from Jacques Ellul, whose concept of technique is defined in *The Technological Society* as means and the ensemble of means, which implies a whole complex of rationally ordered methods for making any human activity more efficient (19). Technology in media scholarship always associates within social setting and an economic and political context (Postman, *Amusing* 84).

There are several dramatic shifts of communication media that helped alter the history of human communication. For instance, the invention of the alphabet pushed the gradual transition in human communication from an oral tradition to written culture. The invention of the printing press, as Brewster and Palmer argue, marked a great forward step in civilization and laid the foundation of modern publicity and advertising (6). The invention of computers moved human communication from typographic to electronic, and the birth of the Internet even broadens human communication to more possibilities.

McLuhan's famous aphorism "the medium is the message" provokes a popular discussion on the study of media. McLuhan demonstrates that modern media are extensions of human bodies and human consciousness, and media expand our ability to

experience bodily extensions. By concentrating on the notion of a “message,” McLuhan argues in *Understanding Media* that a medium itself is a message that conveys content and meaning, and a medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action (9). Postman, however, contends that our forms of media are more like metaphors than messages that are “working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special definition of reality” (*Amusing* 10).

Postman amends McLuhan’s aphorism and argues, “the medium is the metaphor” (*Amusing* 10). Postman clarifies that people live in social contexts, in which human perceptions, feelings and thoughts are constantly and significantly influenced. Contents are closely related to forms. Media are those forms. What Postman proposes is an outlook into the future. Every time people are introduced into a culture by a new medium, there occurs a transformation of their thinking-world. That is what “the medium is the metaphor” implies.

Postman holds critical attitudes towards technology, and how technology could be dangerous and even harmful to the humanities. While technological progress has significantly propelled the development of human society, nevertheless, how people uncritically embrace and celebrate technology is pervasive yet dangerous. He believes that new technologies affect human beings’ habits of thought by altering “the things we think about” and “the things we think with” (*Technopoly* 20). The consciousness about how technologies do TO our thoughts is what Postman aims to address.

Elaborated in his book *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. Postman regards technology as a friend and an enemy (xii). Postman is particularly concerned about how, when, and why technology becomes a dangerous enemy to human

beings. In *Technopoly*, Postman proposes three human cultures that emerge and evolve with the development of technology: tool-using culture, technocracy, and Technopoly. In tool-using cultures, tools are invented to either solve urgent and specific problems of physical life for human beings, or serve the symbolic needs in human lives. In a tool-using culture, tools are integrated into the culture and do not attack or challenge the belief system or ideology (23). In a technocracy, tools play central roles in the *thought-world* of the culture. Tools are not integrated into the culture, but they start to attack the culture (28). When Technocracy moves to its totalitarian status, it becomes the third culture, which Postman calls “Technopoly” - a culture in which tools not only attack culture, but they become the culture (48).

Postman condemns a society wherein technology holds a monopoly on culture, and new technology puts old institutions in crisis. Ellul expresses the same concern in regards to a technological society in which “nothing of a sociological character available to restrain technique, because everything in society is its servant. Technique is essentially independent of the human being who finds himself naked and disarmed before it” (306). Technopoly redefines what we think of religion, art, politics or history. Important social symbols are drained and trivialized. Tradition is becoming less important than it should. In Technopoly, Postman envisions that we ultimately and unconsciously surrender our culture to technology (*Technopoly* 52).

Postman’s concern about the capacity of media and technology shaping human consciousness has been constantly applied in explaining current social issues. Julia Keller in her article “Killing Me Microsoftly” criticizes the use of software in the classroom environment and contends that technology such as Powerpoint squeezes ideas into a

preconceived format, organizing and condensing not only the material, but more importantly, an audience's way of thinking about the material. Aubrey Nagal discusses the current "mobile first" culture from Postman's standpoint, and points out that mobile media "present information *en masse* in random order, out of context, and for milliseconds at a time, remaining extremely biased toward the visually interesting". Media scholar Lance Strate published *Amazing Ourselves to Death* in 2014 as a tribute to Postman. Strate explains that his goal is to present Postman's overall approach that is grounded in media ecology and to show how it can continue to be applied in the future (xiv).

Postman has always been concerned that people always focus on the advancement of technology, but neglect or ignore the negative effects on human affairs, such as tradition and religion being trivialized and human perception and consciousness being jeopardized. Advertising, according to Postman, is "a symptom of a world-view that sees tradition as an obstacle to its claims" (*Technopoly* 170). The danger does not lie in the fact that people will take advertising more seriously than they should, but in the fact that people gradually and unconsciously lose the abilities to distinguish between serious and entertaining contexts when they are accustomed to certain kinds of interruptions and compositions. Postman says, advertising, especially in the form of television commercials, always appears as an interruption between serious topics. People are so immersed in the entertainment culture, which leads to a blur of boundaries between seriousness and entertainment.

Postman's arguments on media inherit the tradition of media ecology. Media ecology, as a field of study, addressing the issue of media effects at the center of its

discipline, provides both philosophical and historical explanations to our understanding of media. Media ecology studies the media influence over human consciousness and human behavior. Media ecologists are concerned about how the modes of communication affect people's perception, understanding and feeling, and how social institutions, norms and cultures are challenged and altered accordingly.

Harold Innis in *The Bias of Communication* discusses the social and cultural changes that are found in the development of communication media (3-32). Innis contends that a new technology attacks traditional knowledge. He argues that a medium of communication has an important influence on the dissemination of knowledge over space and time, and such emphasis on time and space implies a bias of significance to the culture in which it is imbedded (33). McLuhan appreciates the historical perspective that Innis adopts. Like Innis, McLuhan is also interested in how communication technology has affected social institutions.

However, McLuhan makes greater contribution to the understanding of how communication media impact human cognitive functions on the individual level. McLuhan proposes all media and technologies as extensions of human bodies (*Understanding* 49). Any medium affects the entire field of the senses, and the power of media shapes and reshapes human lives. Elizabeth Eisenstein also gives significant attention to the medium's influence on human perception and consciousness, especially how the printing press leads to a revolution in human culture (3). As Strate comments, media ecology provides a dialectical approach to further our understanding of the different effects from different communication media (*Amazing* 70).

Integrated Marketing Communication

Advertising has long been an essential component of marketing practices. O'Toole posits advertising as a sub-category of the marketing, along with other forms of promotional communication such as public relations, personal selling, and corporate communication (9). Terrence Shimp discusses that marketing communication in general and advertising in particular is a major source of competitive advantage in consumer markets (6). McLuhan finds the natural attraction of advertising in a world of abundance, while Postman takes advertising as the voice of commerce.

Prior to the twentieth century, formal studies of marketing focus on the distribution and exchange of commodities and manufactured products, and feature a foundation in economics. Marketing communication, as Edwina Luck and Jennifer Moffatt suggests, is grounded in the theoretical concepts of what is known as "4Ps" (product, price, place and promotion) (312). However, scholars realize that the 4Ps approach ignores many other essential elements of an effective marketing communication, such as customers and media. Early marketing concepts of the twentieth century are no longer valid. As the marketplace has become more competitive and consolidated, there are emerging trends of looking at marketing communication from more integrated and ecological perspectives.

Not until the early 1990s did Dan Schultz, Stanley Tannenbaum and Robert Lauterborn in *The New Marketing Paradigm: Integrated Marketing Communications* frame the concept of integrated marketing communications (xvii). This concept of marketing communications reflects managerial interest in coordinating different media to optimize the effectiveness of marketing communications. IMC can be seen as a new

paradigm in marketing communications, equipped with central concepts that apply to many business environments in the marketplace. IMC reframes a perspective of looking at the whole marketing communications instead of the sum of parts such as advertising, public relations, purchasing and so forth (Schultz et al. xvii). However, the concept of IMC is not a new invention. Edward Bernays has already provided a similar idea of such integration in his book *Public Relations*, where he emphasized the importance for public relations counsel to maintain good relationships with the whole of “human relationships,” including workers, stockholders, retailers, distributors, government, and consumers (117).

As Michael Ewing suggests, marketing communication has historically been measured on a medium-by-medium basis (30). Frank Mulhern discusses the transformation of media that has a significant influence on IMC practices, as media synergy generates new insights into the true nature of integration in IMC (11-27). Don Schultz and Heidi Schultz situate the customer as the true center in IMC, and they argue that the customers control the integration and synergy (55). It has been widely accepted that the integration and synergy come from media consumption by the consumer (Luck and Moffatt 319).

Communication scholars are paying increasing attention to the interactivity as essential to IMC, which is enabled by media. More and more scholarship is devoted to the research on the dynamics of recipients’ opinions and attitudes towards advertising, as consumers’ responses become critical to advertising effectiveness. For example, Gulnara Z Karimova approaches advertising by considering the principle of ‘unfinalizability’, ‘polyphony’, and ‘dialogic relationship’ from Bakhtinian philosophy (251-269).

As a functional and civic communication practice, IMC makes a significant contribution to the understanding of human nature. Human beings have the nature of seeking pleasure and amusement. Strate says that the amusement is part of what makes people human (4). IMC provides a vivid platform to see how human nature is displayed, affected and manipulated by our own choices of communication media. Through advertising, Postman takes us on a journey to understanding ourselves by understanding our living environment. He calls for a media conscious that our gain in a technological society is always a trade off. There are dangerous effects on humanities and even on the ways in which people view and relate to the world, to other people and to themselves. Postman is looking to find a balance between humanity and technology and makes us to think “how to live the best of your lives” (Sternberg).

Research Approach

Over time, the rapid developments of media and technology, the innovation and creative approaches from advertising companies, and the blurring boundaries between various genres have brought dynamic changes in the definition and function of advertising. With the emergence of various media, the concept of media synergy, as Schultz et al. discuss, has become an increasingly important topic and has helped to generate new insights into the true nature of IMC (173). Therefore, contemplating IMC from a media perspective is practical and functional.

Media ecology offers a constructive approach to investigate IMC practices. Media ecology has the tradition of exploring how our tools for conversation have altered our thinking and behaviors, and ultimately our lives, through time. The major theoretical contribution of media ecology lies in the questions concerning how human consciousness

and human behaviors are affected by changes in human environments caused by changes in communication media.

McLuhan's "the medium is the message" sets the basic theoretical tone for the field of media ecology. McLuhan proposes a view of looking at media as great corporate art forms, and he is concerned about how media can catch attention and make effects, like music or painting (17). His major concern is to add serious consideration of form to the studies of content. Postman differentiates between message and metaphor:

A message denotes a specific, concrete statement about the world. But the forms of our media, including the symbols through which they permit conversation, do not make such statements. They are rather like metaphors, working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special definitions of reality.

(Amusing 10)

People experience the world through the lens of different media, from direct verbal conversation to printed words, from television to Internet. Postman's media-metaphor classifies the world for people to look at their connections with other people, with their lived world and with themselves.

He discusses how one form of public discourse regulates and even dictates what kind of content can ensue from such form. Postman believes that form and content are closely related. Certain forms can only sustain certain content, and certain content can only be delivered through certain forms. He develops this idea mainly from his skepticism about television as an inadequate medium for seriousness. For example, he proposes that television filled with advertisement promotes utopian and childish ideas.

Advertising appears as an important metaphor for Postman to explore the effect of technology on humanity. For instance, Postman explains the danger of media by calling advertisement an “instant therapy” that leads people to believe all problems have technological solutions through technological interventions or techniques. Postman is concerned about how technology can affect human culture, when he argues that advertising becomes distant from rationality despite having been closely connected in the eighteenth century. With the development of media, advertising is “not at all about the character of products to be consumed, but about the character of the consumers of products” (128). Postman’s insights on media through the discussion of advertising create an opening for in-depth exploration of IMC.

In his 1973 keynote speech at the Speech Communication Association, Postman discusses common grounds between communication environments based on face-to-face interaction occurring in physical locations and media environments that are created by way of technological transmission and storage of messages. Not only does Postman is attentive to media change; but more importantly, he is attentiveness to the change within the whole media environment. Strate points out that the core of understanding Postman’s arguments lies in understanding the context (*Amazing 4*).

Understanding the context is also discussed in his books regarding language and education. In *Crazy Talk, Stupid Talk*, Postman emphasizes the importance of semantic environments where non-effective and inappropriate language can take place in human communication processes (20). In *Conscientious Objections*, Postman also addresses the problem of the ignorance of the decline of language in our culture. He is especially

worried that the decline of language has been so pervasive that most people no longer perceive it as a problem (xiv).

Understanding the context is extended in Postman's definition of media ecology as a study of media as environments (Reform 161). An environment forms a complex system that imposes certain ways of thought, feeling and behavior. Postman's media ecology looks into the matter of how people live in the media, how communication media affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value, and how human interaction with media facilitates or impedes the humanities. Postman is appalled not so much by the specific content of television as by the very essence of the medium, which he sees as an enemy of literacy and serious thinking. A medium such as television trivializes what is supposed to be serious and significant, and has an extensive influence over other human affairs.

Postman's critique is a wake up call for a media consciousness. He makes aware of the media environment, and the effects of a media environment on our thought-world. As Postman suggests, "the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation" (*Amusing* 8). This project is going to apply Postman's media ecology perspectives to interpret his critique of advertising and media, and further extends into the discussion about IMC.

Overview of the Project

Chapter two will provide a synopsis of advertising in the historical context. Starting with the emergence and early forms of advertising, this chapter is going to trace

the development of advertising in terms of the changes in definition and function. How advertising is a metaphor for further investigation of media and IMC will be discussed.

Chapter three discusses the role of media in human communication by introducing media ecology in general and Postman's media ecology perspectives in particular. This chapter offers a review of the media ecology tradition. Media ecologists have contributed significantly to the communication discipline with valuable insights on how technologies, especially the modes of information and codes of communication, play influential roles in human activities. The profound media ecology traditions provide new perspectives to explore mediated communication practices.

Chapter four is going to offer an account of Postman on advertising in detail. Postman is known for his critiques on the dangerous impact medium and technology have on human societies. Advertising acts as an important metaphor in his various books, articles, speeches and interviews. This chapter aims to outline the important themes and topics that Postman discusses about advertising, which provides new perspectives to further understand IMC practices in today's media environment.

Chapter five explores IMC in the current media environment- the age of smartphone. This chapter intends to seek implications from Postman's past ideas and inform today's IMC effects and influences. Postman's media ecology ideas offer guidance for us to explore the status quo of IMC; and more importantly, Postman helps us discover the problems that are prevailing but easily ignored in today's IMC practices.

Chapter six is an attempt to seek implications from Postman's ideas and offer a creative and constructive approach to understand IMC and seek better IMC practices in today's media environment. Rooted in media ecology, Postman's thermostatic

perspective provides a constructive approach to understand IMC as mediated communication. This chapter aims to find implications in Postman, stated or implied, and suggest more ethical, humanistic and effective IMC practices.

CHAPTER TWO

A SYNOPOSIS OF ADVERTISING

With the development of technology, human societies have experienced tremendous changes and challenges throughout the history. While we embrace technological progress, humanistic scholars endeavor to alert on uncritical and unreflective celebration of technology. Neil Postman is one of them.

Well-known as an educator and a culture critic, Neil Postman holds critical views towards how technologies affect humanities, especially how communication media affect human communication in particular. Advertising appears as an important metaphor underlying his arguments in many of his books, articles and lectures. Through advertising, Postman provokes critical thinking on the roles that media have played in shaping human cultures.

Advertising has a profound history of being an important topic in communication and rhetorical studies. Scholars from multiple disciplines investigate advertising as science, communication, culture, and persuasion. This chapter is going to first provide a synopsis of advertising in a historical context from ancient times, to the Industrial Revolution time, the broadcasting era, and finally the digital age. How advertising develops from early forms such as word-of-mouth, written signs and symbols, to the later typographic forms as shown on newspapers and magazines, to multimedia application in digital and mobile age, will be reviewed. Along with the evolution of the forms, the shifting understanding of the role of advertising will be discussed as well. Advertising as an essential marketing practice has never changed. In the age of IMC, advertising still acts as the most prominent practice. This chapter aims to expatiate that the history of

advertising provides a profound foundation to understand the role of media in IMC practice.

A Brief History of Advertising

Ancient Time

The history of advertising can be traced back to as early as Antiquity. Brewster and Palmer propose that the earliest form of advertising starts from word-of-mouth, when spoken language is the primary medium in the ancient time (4). They suggest that word-of-mouth advertising might come into existence as soon as people desired to barter with each other in the early marketplace (4). Spoken publicity as recognized in early Hebrew, Greek and Roman civilization, acted as advertising, with “public criers making in their business to proclaim news of articles for sale as well as news of current happenings”(4).

Frank Presbrey expounds in *History of Advertising*, the progenitor of today’s advertising can be traced back to the oral salesmanship back in the tribal state of mankind (2). According to Presbrey, the early commercial advertising form appears to be the criers in early Egypt. The criers make announcements of the arrival of ships and makes offerings of items from the cargos (4). In later Greek, criers act as auctioneers, doing the selling as well as the advertising of slaves and animals with the substantial “media” - their voices (5). The criers are selected for their pleasing voices and elocutionary abilities, and are sometimes accompanied by musicians, similar to the fancy visual and graphic effects in today’s advertisements (5).

The Babylonians made the first written advertisement, according to Presbrey, of a stenciled inscription on bricks over three thousand years ago (2). Egyptians wrote

advertisements on papyrus for slaves, and ancient Roman created signboards to designate stores and shops of various kinds. Tablets made of stone or terracotta were used for advertisements. During the time of ruins of Pompeii, a sign of promoting a brothel appeared as an early example of advertising (Tungate 7). Outdoor advertising such as tradesmen's signs and tavern signs serve as references to services ranging from booksellers to brothels (Nevette 25).

With the major communication technologies of language and writing, word-of-mouth and written signs appear as the dominant forms of early advertisements in ancient time. As of today, the popular and common types of posters, billboards and promotions all started in ancient times; word-of mouth advertising is still believed to be the most powerful mode of advertising in the modern society.

The Age of Printing Press

The development of technology brings new climate to the marketplace. Cynthia Meyers states that technological advancements such as the increased use of assembly production lines, the improvement of transportation technologies such as railroads, the development of new retail outlets and distribution channels including department stores, contribute to mass production and growing consumption (14). The appearance of the printing press marks a big step forward in all realms of human communication. As the printing industry makes newspapers and magazines commonplace and affordable to the public, advertising moves its stride with the Industrial Revolution aided by the rise of the newspaper as a mass communication medium. Printed advertising, newspaper advertising in particular, becomes an ideal for the marketers (Tungate 9).

Meyer argues that, with the new media, marketers seek to extend the personal approach of the salesman into the impersonal medium of print (19). Newspapers and magazines prove to reach a wider range of people. Such impersonal and mass-mediated advertisements gradually displace the traditional marketing methods. The emergence of print media does not destroy the merits of an oral culture; instead it enables the fast flow of information and knowledge, and facilitates more literacy in a typographic society.

In 1631 France, Theophraste Renaudot, a doctor became the inventor of the first French personal advertisement (Tungate 8). He created the first French newspaper *La Gazette* offering all kinds of advertisements from buying and selling goods, seeking jobs to making public announcements (Tungate 8). In 1704 America, the first newspaper advertisement was published in the Boston newsletter - an announcement that sought for a buyer for an Oyster bay (Presbrey 126). In the 18th century, advertisements started to appear in newspapers in England. These print advertisements were used mainly to promote books and newspapers. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, newspaper provided a cheap and locally available medium of advertisements that offered primarily means of publishing information of seeking army deserters, runaway convicts or servants (Morgan and Rushton 39). As Dyer suggests, the relationship between newspaper industry and advertising are inextricably intertwined: advertising shapes the tone and style of newspaper, and it ultimately decides the viability of newspapers (64).

Dyer further explains that during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, advertising acts as a relatively straightforward means of announcement and communication to promote novelties and fringe products (39). However, the economic depression from 1873 to 1894 marks a turning point. The crisis of over-production and

under-consumption make companies to rely more and more on mass advertising to promote their products (40). After the second World War, advertising expanded rapidly alongside the media of mass communication. A new method of persuasion emerges and the industry extends to embrace more techniques.

Pamela Odih finds that newspaper circulation increases significantly particularly from the mid eighteenth century onwards. Towards the end of nineteenth century, advertising has evolved from publisher's space salesman into a more developed system of space-brokerage and consultation (Odih 49). The emergence of advertising agencies sets up the foundation for the modern advertising industry eventually (Odih 49). The printed word is the primary medium for advertising until a new medium enters the realm of mass communication – radio. Advertising moves into the age of mass broadcasting.

The Age of Broadcasting

The push to enter radio in the late 1920's in America comes not from within the advertising industry but from outside. As Meyers points out, advertising agencies, facing competition for clients from other program producers, soon moved into radio to explore alternatives for engaging audiences with varying levels of enthusiasm and commitment (77). Advertising industry also cooperates closely with the government in disseminating propaganda, and radio becomes the most important medium to mobilize propaganda campaigns during the war time (Meyers 235). As radio use increases after World War I, spread in part by radio-trained war veterans, commercial and noncommercial interests struggled over who have legitimate access to the airwaves (Meyers 34).

In 1922, the federal government defined broadcast stations as commercial entities and assigned them to the purview of the Department of Commerce. After that, the likes of retailers, newspapers, and manufacturers who invested in stations began to utilize radio as a “promotional medium” (Meyers 34). “Radiophonic” – the multi-tiered structure of local and national broadcasters, technologies, and economic relationships, as suggested by Radio historian Alexander Russo, begin to develop rapidly (9). By the late 1920s, in the United States, the establishment of national networks symbolizes the keystone of the development of commercial broadcasting. The linkage of national stations into networks that could efficiently share programming and connect advertisers with national audiences provide the infrastructure for radio’s emergence as a national medium of American popular culture.

Radio ads allow advertisers to penetrate multiple markets on a scale hitherto unseen in the print media. As Frank Arnold suggests, advertisers, who are not bothered with local markets, are thus lured into radio sponsorship (8). Major advertising agencies, having previously established magazine or newspaper as a national advertising medium, are also interested in developing a market with the medium of radio, a potentially more lucrative business than local broadcast advertising. Marketers seek to develop mass markets for their products and are willing to invest heavily in radio advertising such as Procter & Gamble and General Motor. Meanwhile, with the booming economy and a growing consumerism, radio quickly finds a place in American homes along with other technologies, such as refrigerators and washing machines. Radio becomes a cultural necessity to Americans.

Radio, as a mass medium, penetrates the domestic space of the home and audience's private space, and becomes a personal medium. More and more advertisers embrace radio as better means of advertising because the presence of human voice in the advertising better engages the listeners' trust, because the "ear" as opposed to the eye can be considered "a most receptive channel for appeals to reason or emotion" (Meyers 51). Charles Hull Wolfe regards advertising as always available "on the air": "in the haze of prehistory, a savage beat out tom-tom signals along a jungle-lined river and caused the magic of sound to rouse a distant audience of tribesmen" (612). As a new mass communication medium, radio manifests not only the technological development, but also the roots in human history and behavior (Meyers 33).

Advertising on radio is like what Meyers calls the "fleeting impression" (73). Whether advertisers prefer rational or emotional appeals, they are safe with radio because, unlike print, the human voices could convey nuances of meaning or express feeling and intimacy. And unlike the print media circulation, radio's reach or penetration to the audience is hard to be measured. Radio strengthens the seller-purchaser relationships as it provides a nurturing companionship.

As radio advertising moves from indirect advertising approaches, such as naming the program after the product, toward direct advertising approaches, advertisers who have been accustomed to print media struggle to adapt to the new media environment. Although radio advertising is getting popular, Arnold emphasizes that broadcast advertising would supplement rather than supplant print advertising (4). Arnold designates radio the "forth dimension of advertising." Newspaper represents the first dimension of "the bulwark of our civilization," while magazine as the second dimension

contributes to “the literary culture of the people” (4). Outdoor advertising is the third dimension that includes billboards and display advertising, while broadcasting is the fourth dimension that adds “height” to advertising (5). With this construct, Arnold positions radio as a partner to and extension of existing media, as well as an addition to existing advertising means.

The debate over the usefulness and necessity of showmanship rises in the early radio era. The soft sell strategy which embraces entertainment as a powerful attention-getting device, and positive association between product and consumers’ emotion, becomes the dominant advertising strategy onward, when rational, product-centered hard sell strategies recedes in importance. This debate continues to prevail in advertising industry and becomes more prominent when television displaces radio as a more popular medium from the 1950s.

Dyer asserts that the most significant aspect of post-war advertising emerges with the coming of television (56). Television has been used as an advertising medium ever since the day the device was introduced to the marketplace in 1939. The rising rate of possession and use of television in the 1950s dramatically enlarge the arena for advertising. Television, unlike print or radio, according to Jack Miller, illustrates a multi-media advertising vehicle, which combines sight, sound, motion and immediacy (7). Douglas Stapleton notices that television will demand much greater attention and engagement from audiences than radio. However, it would make audiences more attentive, thereby increasing the selling impact of any advertising (20). The combination of sound and vision ensures the message through television greater force and impact (Dyer 57). On the other hand, the increasing engagement of the media creates alienation

while it promotes and enforces the sense of individualism. As Joe Cappo concludes, the development of television sets the tone and the priorities of the advertising business for decades to come (4).

In the age of radio, as Meyers finds, agencies work on increasing in cultural importance when producing the majority of programming (169). However, in the age of television, as Marshall McLuhan argues, advertising has become a vast new source of comic effects (*Understanding* 438). The moral concern in advertising has risen to become the most debated issue, the concern about whether a commercial on television would still be as sincere as on print or on radio is pervasive. Television advertising has ever since become a central target of criticism in the study of marketing practices. Postman's critique of advertising is mainly about advertising in the age of television, which will be discussed in details in the later chapter.

The Age of Digital

The emergence of Internet and the development of digital technologies provide new perspectives to all mediated human communication activities including advertising from 1970s. The Internet appears to be the most revolutionary new medium since television in the late 1950s (Cappo 189). The multi-dimensional adaptability of the Internet supersedes that of any other media in the realm of human communication. It broadens the spectrum of human communication in terms of both form and content. The Internet has made its greatest impact on society as a personal communication medium and a business sales medium.

It does not take long for traditional media to recognize the potential what the Internet offers and the necessity to adapt to the new media environment. Marketers realize that the web entities and the cyberspace have developed their own audiences and their own personalities. Within only a few years after the World Wide Web becomes operable in 1994, thousands of radio and television stations, magazines and newspapers, cable networks and publishing companies set up their own websites (Cappo 173).

Digital technology as a media option has been around since the early twentieth century. Andrew McStay indicates that digital advertising has become a mainstream activity funding a high proportion of platforms and media content online ever since (12). A digital environment makes it possible for marketers to reach more audiences beyond the traditional restraints of time and space. However, in the digital age, it is worth noting that not only do audiences become mobile, so does content. Content becomes no longer exclusive just as audiences are no longer captive (Meyers 292). Advertising in the cyberspace obtains some distinguished characteristics compared to other media. One of the most important aspects, according to McStay, is that traditional advertising media seek to hold attention within a bounded space, while web advertising offer hyperlinks to take the user elsewhere (19). As Tom Sherman indicates, the web advertising is no longer a fringe medium, but a platform that “encompasses all of the media before it and stirs the pot to the boiling point with a large dose of interactivity” instead (166).

Nevertheless, as Cappo notes, the success examples in digital age such as Arizona lemonade and Ben & Jerry’s ice cream explain the effectiveness merited from old methods in traditional advertising of creating buzz among the public and the media without any substantial web advertising investments (49). The success of Internet

companies such as Google comes mainly from the oldest form of advertising - word of mouth (Cappo 49). As new techniques and new media constantly emerge in the marketplace, it is worth contemplating how tradition and traditional ideas still provide significant impacts in the new media environments.

Advertising and Media

Berman takes advertising as the voice of technology, and argues that advertising represents the intention to affect life (16). The history of advertising provides a synopsis of how technology affects human communication in the marketplace. Postman recognizes the significant transition of human cultures and social changes along with the new technologies introduced (*Amusing* 13). Technologies, such as language and writing are not merely extension of human's power to bind time and space. More importantly, they illustrate the transformation of the ways people think and behave, and reflect the changes of cultures (13). William J. Bernstein states in *Masters of The Word*:

Human rapidly evolved the repertoire of behaviors that define our species. These included the desire to cooperate, the ability to conceive abstractions of the physical world, and critically, the first major communications technology: language. The second major communications technology, writing, is simply the recording of those abstractions. (16)

From word-of-mouth publicity to written advertisements, the invention of writing systems including symbol, alphabet and number marks a big step forward in human communication from being oral to written. Writing, as Bernstein suggests, changes the very way that human beings think, behave and ultimately the way human society evolves

(18). Not until the middle of the fifteenth century, advertisements are mostly done either by oral forms or by hand-written signs. The invention of the printing press marks an important step forward in human communication, and lays the foundation for modern publicity and advertising (Brewster and Palmer 6). The printing press shows tremendous influence on advertising, as literacy is primarily acquired from typographic resources. It marks a significant shift from what Innis describes as time-based media that are durable and heavy yet permanent to forms that are space-based and light and portable (26). It reflects the power of media as the carriers of content.

Reeves considers advertising as “the voice of competition – the voice of free enterprise, in a free world” (152). The Internet has changed the way information flows across social circles all over the world. As a result, advertising industry has to equip itself with multimedia and digital methods. As McStay argues, media display their power in shaping popular consciousness and various sub-strata power, ethics and daily habitus in all times (13).

Roger Silverstone in *Why Study the Media* argues that media such as the telephone, film, radio, and television have become both objects of mass consumption as well as essential tools for the conduct of everyday life (4). Hamish Pringle and Jim Marshall regard medium as communication-carrier and believe that there is a relationship between the medium and the message, as proposed by McLuhan, in that the carrier has an effect on the content (27). In the context of advertising, the relationships between the medium and the message are more complex than McLuhan’s “medium is the message”. There are additional factors to take into account such as how the medium is used by the

advertiser, what is the relationship between consumer and the company, what kind of product or service are advertised (Hamish and Marshall 28).

On the other hand, the commercial media show a certain level of dependence on advertising. As Berman points out, advertising has grown into highly developed and sophisticated institution that touches the center of cultural as well as economic life (69). Advertising assists to organize newspaper and broadcast media so that they are not truly independent; instead, they also satisfy the demands of the dominant economic institutions (69). Advertising is considered as essential business that keeps media, such as newspaper or magazine, survive.

Following McLuhan's "medium is the message", Postman proposes his idea of seeing media as metaphors (*Amusing* 13). He argues that media of communication shows dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations (9). Each medium makes a unique mode of discourse possible by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, and sensibility (10). Newspaper illustrates a medium for advertising within limited geographical areas. Radio often presents as a fragmented medium, with different stations appealing to different audiences because of distinctive programming. Radio and television advertisements are limited as to length, but can be repeated frequently.

Cappo argues that listening to radio means differently in those days compared to situations today (63). People often gather together inside of the house and are concentrated on listening to the content together; and people watch television in the early days similar to the way people had listened to radio. It represents a family or social activity with serious participation. Today, however, radio becomes a highly individual

and personal medium (Cappo 63). The appearance of portables digital devices further alters the way people listen to the radio. The portable devices make listening to radio a casual entertaining activity, as it does not require serious involvement.

One of the most important implications from the development of advertising showcases that the emergence of the new medium does not necessarily destroy the old ones. Radio does not destroy newspaper; television does not substitute radio; Internet does not kill television. We still get advertising from all of these media. However, the older media face more challenges when a new medium adds into the field. Cappo explains that new media are simply new places for advertisers to put their marketing message (183). However, Cappo also realizes that The Internet shows superiority to all other media, as it holds multidimensional adaptability and the capability of distributing many other media (194).

From language, to writing, to the television and to digital technologies, every medium of communication, as Postman claims, has the power to impose itself on our consciousness and social institutions in myriad forms, as it directs people about how to organize their minds and integrate their experience of the world (*Amusing* 18). Since media always implicate the ways people define and regulate the ideas of knowledge and truth, media have the power to affect our epistemologies. The change of how modern advertising is perceived stands as an example.

Advertising and Marketing

Marketing, according to O'Reilly and Tennant in *The Age of Persuasion*, possibly coming from the Latin word of "*Mercari*", refers to "all or parts of the process of

conceiving, promoting, distributing and selling a product or service” (xiv). And advertising, possibly coming from the word “*advertere*,” meaning “to turn toward,” refers to bringing product or service to the public ‘s attention, often through paid announcement or commercials (xiv). In fact, as Presbrey points out, the first use of written advertisements in ancient societies are not offers of something for sales, but announcements of rewards for runaway slaves (4). And in the early age of printing, rewards for runaway slaves and servants likewise appeared among the first uses for disseminated advertising on newspapers as well (Presbrey 4).

The modern understanding of advertising comes into existence with the emergence of modern marketplace when there are goods to sell and a medium to promote. John H. Murphy and Isabella Cunningham argue that advertising, as a strong marketing force, pervades media and catches attention of audiences of all kinds (23). Hackley views advertising as a sub-category of the promotional communication, along with other forms such as public relations and personal selling (60). Shimp believes that marketing communication in general and advertising in particular play major roles in competitive consumer markets (1).

According to John O’Toole, the leading agency N.W. Ayer proposes the generally accepted definition of early advertising, which means “keeping your name before the public ” (16). Advertising acts as an information transmission that provides product information and makes the products public and known. The “information processing” model coined by Shannon and Weaver’s model sums up such tradition of advertising along with N.W. Ayer’s definition (44). The most prevalent perspective in the history of modern advertising comes from John E. Kennedy to Albert Lasker that “advertising is

salesmanship in print” (O’Toole 16). This definition applies the concept of persuasion into the creation of advertising for the first time.

The salesmanship definition changes the course of advertising completely and makes possible the enormous role it plays in the marketing communication practices. It transits the idea of advertising from informing to selling and persuading. Reeves, in *Reality in Advertising* argues, advertising encompasses a functional purpose - to sell. Not only does it provide information, it also concerns about complete communication with the public, the maximum projection of the message (113). The most important aspect of advertising, according to Reeves, involves showing the special characteristic of a product, which he calls unique selling proposition, and facilitating penetration to the audiences and compete against other products in the market place. Advertising performs as an art of getting a unique selling proposition into the head of the most people at the lowest possible cost (121).

Claude Hopkins who among the first to liken advertising to personal selling with information or persuasion, holds the similar view as Reeves. The key idea of his *Scientific Advertising* underlies advertising as a science based on fixed principles to sell not to entertain. According to Hopkins, there are correct methods of procedures and universal principles that can be retrieved and proved in the practices through tests and analysis (13). Unlike Hopkins or Reeves, David Ogilvy does not regard advertising as entertainment or an art form, but as a medium of information (1). Compared to selling, Ogilvy concerns more about brand image. Products, like people, have personalities that can be made or broken in the market place. Ogilvy notes that every advertisement should contribute to the brand image, and keep the image consistently in the practices (14).

Brewster and Palmer understand advertising as purchased publicity according to a definite plan to influence people to act or to think as the advertiser desires (9). A more systematic idea of persuasive function of advertising communication comes from Hackly. Advertising works at a cognitive level in that it influences the individual cognitive functions of perception, memory and attitude (Hackly 60). Theories that focus on the cognitive levels of explanation also emphasize rational, conscious thinking of the consumers. Tellis and Ambler criticize that advertisements in the modern age aim more to be persuasive, as it only seeks to change consumer attitudes, beliefs, or behavior (4). Advertising involves more and more in the manipulation of social values and attitudes, and less concerning with the communication of essential information about goods and services, as suggested by Dyer (2).

The debate over the effects of advertising has never ended. Supporters defend advertising as it contributes to economic prosperity of the society and helps raise people's standard of living by encouraging the sales of mass produced goods, stimulating production and creating employment (Dyer 4). On the other side, however, people blame advertising for its moral deficiency as it provides biased and suspect information that aims to create unnecessary desire, and makes people too materialistic by making them believing in possessing and consumption (Dyer 7).

As Postman claims, advertising evolves to its modern stage in the late nineteenth century, and becomes a fast growing and one of the most profitable industries in the marketplace from the early twentieth century. The concept of Integrated Marketing Communication comes into the field in the early 1990s coined by Schultz et al. IMC reflects managerial interest in coordinating different media channels to optimize the

effectiveness of brand marketing communications gives new understanding to advertising (xvii). However, the concept of IMC exists much earlier than the formation of the name.

Edward Bernays offers an idea of integration in his book *Public Relations*, where he emphasizes the importance for public relations counsel to maintain good relationships with the whole of “human relationships” including workers, stockholders, retailers, distributors, government, and consumers (117). IMC responds to modern marketplace; reframes a perspective of traditional marketing practices; and looks at the whole marketing instead of the sum of parts including advertising, public relations, purchasing and promotion (Schultz et al. xvii).

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman takes advertising as the voice of commerce. Berman proposes in *Advertising and Social Change* that technology must be communicated, and the role of advertising has always been to mediate between technology and the marketplace (18). From publicity to persuasion, advertising has always been an important metaphor in marketing communication throughout its history. Advertising manifests how it mediates between media and marketplace, and more importantly, how marketing communication evolves in the changing media environments.

Discussion

History matters. Our view of history shapes the way we view the present, and therefore influences our answers to the present problems. Postman notes in *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century* that past will show itself if we look hard enough in the rearview mirror (6). We will have to seek good ideas available to us in order to better

respond to the new encounters. And in order to do that, we need to look back for those good ideas, the ones that will advance our understanding of ourselves, and enlarge our definitions of humanness (14).

As Bob Batchelor proposes, seeing advertising as environment helps us to ask questions about what kind of environment we live in and how healthy is that environment (51). Advertising offers a starting point to ask questions, seek solutions and find implications about mediated human communication. As Meyers suggests, advertising reflects, incorporates, and comments on the media and culture of its society and time, and the analysis of advertising illuminates its deep involvement in multiple ways of talking about the world (29). The history of advertising offers a ground to understand the relationship between media and human communication.

Advertising illustrates a great transition from oral to written culture in marketing communication with the addition of writing system. The printing press and application of machinery mark a new stage for mediated mass communication in the marketplace. The application of radio and television moves advertising to the broadcasting level that significantly facilitates new public cultures. The use of Internet and digital media brings advertising to a new mode of communication in the marketplace.

Postman holds a historical understanding of medium and media effects. Each medium, from the primal medium of language, to painting and hieroglyphs, to radio and television, makes a unique mode of communication. The history of advertising demonstrates and also documents the change. Moreover, it makes it explicit that different media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations (Postman *Amusing* 9).

CHAPTER THREE

MEDIA ECOLOGY

The history of advertising exemplifies the transformational roles that media play in changing marketing communication practices. Media act as tools as well as environment for making new modes of marketing communication practices possible. IMC is an attempt to replace traditional marketing communications by unifying advertising, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing communication, and synergizing all media and resources. In this new era when media continue getting more and more attention in all aspects of our lives, people constantly make references to phrases such as “medium is the message” or “amusing ourselves to death” both in academic and vernacular narratives with regard to e-commerce, globalization, technology innovation and societal affairs. Although popular topics such as virtual reality and interactive media lead people to know Marshall McLuhan; and the entertainment effect of political campaigns lead people to know Neil Postman, media ecology, as a field of study, still remains unknown to most people including people in the field of IMC.

This chapter aims to discuss the role of media in human communication by introducing the media ecology in general and Postman’s role and perspectives within media ecology in particular. Media ecologists have contributed significantly to the communication discipline with valuable insights on how technology, modes of information and codes of communication play important roles in human affairs. Media ecology concentrates on the evolving media environments and immediate media effects, however, it is deeply grounded in the understanding of the history and philosophy of human communication, especially mediated communication. Media ecology within

communication scholarship provides philosophical perspectives for us to understand the undergoing shift from traditional marketing communications to IMC.

Media Ecology Tradition

Media ecology, defined by Lance Strate, the first President of Media Ecology Association, is a study of media environments. Media ecology aims to help people recognize that technology and techniques, modes of information, and codes of communication play leading roles in human affairs. Media ecology is concerned about the history and philosophy of technology, about rhetoric and literacy, about communication theories and cultural studies. Media ecology addresses issues from preliterate and prehistoric eras to postindustrial and postmodern eras.

The historical and philosophical exploration of technology and culture within the communication scholarship is the root of media ecology. Media ecologists such as Lewis Mumford, Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman contribute significant insights to the profound media ecology tradition.

Mumford, a recognized media ecologist, is regarded as providing “founding work” in media ecology tradition (Strate, *Amazing* 65). Mumford presents profound perspectives of the history of technology and situates the role of technology in the center of human affairs. As stated in *Technics and Civilization*, Mumford’s main concern is about the dominating role of technics played in modern civilization. Human civilization, Western civilization in particular, has been profoundly modified by the development of technics. Technics have swept over human civilization by changing human perceptions

and beliefs, challenging tradition and rituals, defining new social norms, and creating new cultures.

The development of technics indicates not only the material inventions, but more importantly, the change of mind (Mumford 3). Mumford recognizes the technological influence over human beings is both individual and social. Individually, technics change people' habits of thought and behavior. Socially, the regimentation provides a soil for mechanical ideology and new technics to grow in (41). For example, Mumford explains how clock creates new belief in Western civilization. Mumford points out that before clock time is always measured with human events. Time is perceived in an organic way in which it associates with natural cycles of human activities. The clock, nevertheless, disassociates time from human experience, and provides a new measurement of time. The mechanical consciousness disassociates time from organic sequences, and such new perception of time leads to new ideas and habits in people's lives. Ideas such as adding time and saving time come into existence. Mechanical efficiency in production, transportation and consumption is measured with time. Rituals are influenced by the mechanical divisions of hour, minute and second. As Postman comments, Mumford is not a man who looks at clock merely to observe time, but he is more conscious and concerned about the philosophy of clock that how clock creates the idea of "moment to moment" and introduces a new culture to human society (*Amusing* 11).

Mumford also identifies other technics as media in human communication, and provides a elaborated discussion on the role of technics from a dialectical perspective in the historical context. With the aid of mechanical devices, communication media change from physiological expressions, abstract gestures, signs and sounds to hieroglyphics,

painting, drawing, the written alphabet, to the application of neotechnics such as telegraph, telephone and television. To Mumford, the new technics are supplements to the old ones. Mumford admits that new technics bring new features and advantages to communication, such as transcending the limit of time and space.

However, Mumford also alerts that neotechnics such as radio and television brings dangers greater than benefits, as the quality of interpersonal communication is weakened and the organic social communication environment is in danger (239-241). He calls this as “the paradox of communication” (239). The technological advancements, to Mumford, indicates only the multiplication of instruments, and multiplication only indicates multiplying but with little or no critical value to the function and quality of the old ones. Mumford still calls for a restoration of immediacy, intimacy, and face-to-face encounters which puts instantaneous and personal contact central in early human communication.

Robert Casillo regards Mumford as embracing an organic concept in social thought (91). Indeed, an organic concept centers in Mumford’s critique on technics. Mumford’s understanding of technics including forms of tools, instruments, apparatus and utilities as well as machines (12). He also holds that technology is not unique to human beings as he points to beaver dams, bird nests, anthills, and beehives as some of the most elaborate technological constructions in the animal kingdom. Mumford emphasizes the idea that the world of technics is not isolated and self-contained, but it reacts to forces and impulses that come from other parts of the environment (6).

Mumford contends that technics do not exist independently; rather, they are extensions of human’s organism (321). Technics bring human beings into harmony with

their environment, while make them recognize the limit of their capacities. Mumford suggests that in order to subdue technics to human purposes, we should better understand them. The technic itself is a human product with no demands and no promises. It is human spirit and choice that makes demands and promises. To understand technics is not merely a means toward re-orienting our civilization, but more importantly, a means toward understanding the society and ultimately toward understanding ourselves (6).

Harold Innis's focus moves from Mumford's general technics to mainly communication technologies, and as Mumford, Innis takes more attention the issues of time and space. In *The Bias of Communication*, Innis argues that media are used to communicate over time as well as over space, and the physical properties of different media determines their effectiveness at preserving knowledge or transmitting information over distances (36). Each medium embodies a bias in terms of the organizational power and control of information. For instance, telegraph, as a medium, weakens the political control facilitated by postal services. Any empire or society, according to Innis, should be concerned about media with the awareness of time and space biases if it seeks to stabilize. Innis believes that human cultures depend on the balance and proportion of the media they use. We are living in a "global village," as termed by McLuhan, that the concept of space is blurred.

According to Innis, the control of communication system powered many empires in human history. Innis believes that time and space are two dimensions of communication system, with time reflecting durable media such as parchment, clay while space reflecting the less durable media such as papyrus and paper. In his view, every empire in human history has used available communication channels, which is

represented by whatever available communication technologies to emphasize its existence, to strengthen its power and religions, and to achieve its administrative goals that could be centralized or decentralized.

Influenced by Innis, his colleague Marshall McLuhan also takes time and space into account seriously. The idea of media as extensions of human bodies and consciousness illustrates his recognition of the importance of time and space. In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan claims that all media are extensions of human beings, whether the extension of physical bodies or consciousness (9). According to McLuhan, we extend our bodies in space during the mechanical age; we extend our central nervous system in electric technology, when time and space becomes less important. The final phrase of the extension of man comes the technological simulation of consciousness (3-4).

As a key member of the Toronto School, McLuhan is often attributed to set the theoretical ground for media ecology. McLuhan associates media effects with human bodies and put media as important as human beings in all mediated communication. Strate notes that McLuhan establishes “media” and “medium” as synonymous with technology that sets the primary terms for media ecology (*Understanding* 3). The Media ecology tradition tends to view all technologies as media. All human inventions and innovations are media. McLuhan emphasizes the human end of technology and argues that technologies are extensions of our bodies and capabilities.

He elaborates in *Laws of Media* that all of man’s artifacts, whether language, or laws, or ideas and hypotheses, or tools, or clothing, or computers, are extensions of the physical human body or the mind (93). There is a transformational effect of our artificial

organs. They generate new conditions of environmental service and of life, and these are the concerns of the laws of media (97). Therefore, media as “the ground-configurations of effects, the service environments of technologies, are inaccessible to direct examination since their effects are mainly subliminal” (98). In extending ourselves, our technologies come between ourselves and our environments, and thereby become our new environments eventually (135). As Strate suggests, McLuhan’s emphasis on the sense perception and the phenomenology of communication brings imperative implications in exploring the historical shift from an acoustic orientation in the scribal culture to visual orientation that accompanies the printing revolution (*Amazing* 22).

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan conducts a series of historical observations of the new cultures that created by various technologies. McLuhan considers Innis the first to address alphabet as an aggressive and militant absorber and transformer of cultures, and as the first person to “hit upon the process of change as implicit in the forms of media technology” (50). As Mumford and Innis, McLuhan also believes that technology creates human culture. For example, McLuhan points out that script and papyrus created the social environment and civilization in connection with the empires of the ancient world. McLuhan notes that technology such as typography is not only technology, but also a natural resource itself. Print, turned the “dialogue of shared discourses into packaged information”, is itself a portable commodity (164). McLuhan believes that technological environments are not merely passive containers of people, but are active processes that reshape people and other technologies alike (0).

With Mumford, McLuhan also recognizes that technological influence is individual as well as social, because technologies shape not only private senses, but also

patterns of communal interdependence. McLuhan thinks that a society cannot go far toward the control of both natural and human forces without a technology tending to process experience homogeneously (165). And McLuhan indicates that technologies such as telegraph, radio and TV do not tend towards the homogeneous effect as what print does (166). Therefore, they create and sustain different types of social environments and culture.

McLuhan's understanding of media is similar to what Ellul calls "La Technique" and what Postman calls "Technopoly". Ellul defines "technique" in *The Technological Society* as means and the ensemble of means, which implies a whole complex of rationally ordered methods for making any human activity more efficient (19). Postman's *Technopoly* is a totalitarian technocracy that put tools in the center of a thought-world of the culture (28). All these concepts put the invasive effect of technology or media in the center of shaping a culture. Postman discusses that new technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols what we think with; and alter the nature of community in which thought develop (*Technopoly* 20). In a culture of Technopoly, the problem is the trivialization of significant cultural symbols, and further trivialization of mindsets (165). Such trivialization has remained the problem of integrated marketing communication practices, such as advertising.

As a student of McLuhan, Walter Ong, as Strate comments, has a significant contribution to media ecology, as he sets the standard and demonstrates the possibilities for scholarship in the media ecology intellectual tradition (16). Media ecology embodies what Ong refers to as an "ecological concern", which he describes as "a new state of

consciousness, the ultimate in open-system awareness. Its trust in the dialectical opposite of the isolating thrust of writing and print” (324).

In his most famous work *Orality and Literacy*, Ong’s deliberation about the dynamics of orality and literacy provides historical and philosophical insights into the nature of mediated human communication. In a historical context, Ong investigates the shift from orality to literacy, from chirography to typography, and from print media to electronic media. Ong introduces the concept of primary orality, which exists before writing; and secondary orality, that is associated with the electronic media. By discussing how different media work in the establishment of different cultures, Ong helps us to understand media as evolving environments and homeostatic ecologies (36). According to Ong, oral communication unites people in groups, while writing and reading are solitary activities. A comparison between orality and literacy can be drawn from the evidence that oral people externalize behavior, when literates interiorize it (69). Similar to Mumford’s idea of new technics, Ong agrees that new forms of communication build on old forms, but each one affects the relationships in human interaction.

From Mumford’s organic conception, Innis’s time and space bias, McLuhan’s hot and cold media, and Ong’s orality and literacy approach, media ecologists always work in a dialectical perspective in studying media. Media ecologists recognize the unique media environment at a given society at a given time. Such perspective is important in studying media because it recognizes media as evolving environment. And the study media as environment is central in Postman’s media ecology perspective.

Postman's Media Ecology

If McLuhan, Innis and Ong provide theoretical foundations to media ecology, Postman is the torchbearer who coins media ecology and makes media ecology not only a school of thought but also a field of study. Media ecology is known as Toronto School as well as New York School. If McLuhan is the key person in Toronto School, Postman is no doubt the most important figure in New York School. Postman established the first Ph.D program in media ecology at New York University in 1973. Media ecology association was later founded by five of Postman's students in Fordham University in 1998. As Niall Stephens says, Postman should be credited with popularizing the media ecology (2029).

Media ecology as a field first appeared in Postman's address of "the Reformation of English curriculum" delivered at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1968. In the address, Postman defined media ecology as "the study of media as environments, suggesting that the main concern of media ecology is how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling and value, and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival (161). Environment is a complex message system in media ecology that imposes certain ways of thinking, feeling and behaving on human beings. In the case of media environments, such as radio and television, they are more often implicit and informal, half concealed by our assumption that what we are dealing with is not an environment but merely a machine. Media ecology, as Postman claims, is to make these specifications explicit.

The biological metaphor that Postman adopts reflects the fundamental principle of media ecology that: "a medium is a technology within which a culture grows"

(*Humanism* 10). The ecological perspective of media sits in the media ecology tradition. Media ecology, as Postman defines, intends to make us more conscious of the fact that human beings live in two environments – natural environment and media environment. The natural environment consists of air and trees; while the media environment consists of language, numbers and all other symbols, techniques and machinery. Media gives form to a culture's politics, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking. It is the media environment that makes us what we are (*Humanism* 11). Media ecology is interested not only in media, but also the interaction between media and human beings. Media ecology aims to further our insights into how we stand as human beings, and how we conduct moral actions in our lives (*Humanism* 16).

Postman's ideas of media manifest the humanistic foundation in media ecology tradition. Mumford questions how human society surrenders to the machine; Innis criticizes how the characters of media affect human civilization. McLuhan reminds us of looking into the rearview mirror where past is laid out for our inspection toward moving into the future. As what Daniel Boorstin provokes, technologies have given us extravagant expectations about the world, and led us replace reality with our now easily manufactured illusions (48). Postman criticizes the fact that people tend to think all problems have solutions, and such solutions can be found in technological progress.

McLuhan's perspective of medium as the message has been influential for long in the study of communication, media and culture. Strate regards McLuhan's "the medium is the message" as a wake-up call to people who tend to ignore the medium but only value content (*Amazing* 130). As McLuhan explains, if the content of television is the movie, people are always aware only of the content, but ignore the medium- television.

Television is an environment that conveys meanings and bears certain significance.

Medium as the message, on the other hand, indicates that the content of a medium is, in a certain way, another medium. For example, the medium of speech becomes the content of writing; the medium of writing becomes the content of print. Medium, as important as content, shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action (9).

McLuhan focuses on contemporary media environments and immediate media effects on human consciousness, with a particular interest in the transformative powers of television. Medium-message defines media or technologies as the leading roles of how and what we communicate, how we think, feel, and use our senses in our social organization, and most importantly, in our ways of lives. Susan Sontag articulates in *On Photography* that our sense of situation is articulated by the camera's intervention (11). A photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; taking photograph itself is an event itself. Cameras do not make it to apprehend more by seeing, but they change seeing itself, by fostering the idea of seeing for seeing's sake (93). McLuhan considers media as art forms, and like music or painting, that they intend to catch attention and make effects (17).

Significantly Influenced by McLuhan, nevertheless, Postman extends McLuhan's aphorism further by asserting that media do not make statements as what messages do. Rather, media are like metaphors "working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special definitions of reality" (*Amusing* 10). We experience the world through the lens of different media. The world through the lens of words will look different from the world through the television. Every medium of communication makes a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, expression and

sensibility. By calling media as metaphors, Postman proposes an epistemological orientation of media by pointing out that media change affects people's cognitive capacities by affecting the perception and understanding, which has an extensive impact on their knowing of the reality (*Amusing* 27).

Both Postman's medium-metaphor and McLuhan's medium-message showcase that media ecology posits human consciousness, perception and understanding in the center of its concern. As Strate states, what McLuhan and Postman advocate is liberation for human minds and spirits from the subjugation to symbol system, media and technologies, and such liberation can only begin with a call to pay attention to medium (*Amazing* 130).

McLuhan claims that it is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without the knowledge of the way media work as environments (26). Strate also suggests in the article "Studying Media As Media: McLuhan and The Media Ecology Approach" that we ought to use our power of observation to reveal the invisible media environments, and make meaning out of our media environments and their effects (129). While most people are more interested in content, media ecologists call for a media consciousness. Recognizing the media environment is a step forward towards understanding the process, change and meaning of human lives.

After making media environment explicit, Postman's concern moves to the understanding of media change. As he discusses, media change is more than additive; it is ecological. When a new medium joins an existing media environment, the social consequence does not remain simply as a mix of the old culture with the new medium. When television entered in the print dominant environment, the social and intellectual

cultures of the society were changed ecologically. A new image-culture emerged. Coherent information and logical explanations that are once favored in the print culture got obsolete, because television has preyed on people's decreasing attention spans and made them hungry for entertaining quips rather than substantive information and knowledge. Postman also notices that television culture differs from print culture, because it does not rule out audiences based on their intellectual capacities. Since a medium has its bias towards content and audience, culture grows out differently in different media.

Contemplating IMC from Media Ecology Perspective

Prior to the twentieth century, formal studies of marketing focus on the distribution and exchange of commodities and manufactured products, and feature a foundation in economics. Marketing communication, as Edwina Luck and Jennifer Moffatt contend is grounded in the theoretical concepts of what is known as "4Ps" (product, price, place and promotion) (312). However, scholars criticize that "4Ps" ignores some other essential participants of an effective marketing communication, such as media and customers. While technological advancement brings challenges to mass market and mass communication, there rises a growing recognition that early marketing concepts of the twentieth century are no longer sufficient to accommodate the modern marketplace and modern minds. Not until the early 1990s do Dan Schultz, Stanley Tannenbaum and Robert Lauterborn frame the concept of integrated marketing communication, which has ever since dominated the discussion of communication in the marketplace (xvii).

IMC embraces a perspective of looking at the whole marketing communications instead of parts such as advertising, public relations, purchasing employee communications, and so forth (Schultz et al. xvii). IMC promotes a holistic perspective on integrating media resources and puts customer the center of marketers' concern. Nevertheless, the fundamental idea of IMC is not new to marketing communication. Edward Bernays provided a similar idea in *Public Relations, in which he* emphasized the importance for public relations counsel to maintain good relationships with the whole of "human relationships," including workers, stockholders, retailers, distributors, government, and consumers (117). They believe that relationship marketing is the key to all future marketing practices, and it is only through IMC that relationship marketing is possible (52). As Schultz et al. also state, IMC is less an innovation than a response to the fracturing of old rules and reality (2).

IMC emerges with the background of the collapse of mass media and mass market and the rapid development of new media and "new age" customers (Schultz et al. 10). Ewing points out that marketing communication has historically been measured on a medium-by-medium basis (30). Mulhern also indicates that the transformation of media has a significant influence on IMC practices (11-27). With the emergence of various media, the concept of media synergy has become an inevitable and important topic and has helped to generate new insights into the nature of IMC (Schultz et al. 173).

From media ecology perspectives, what IMC calls for is more of a new perspective of how human communication respond to the shifting media environments. Thus, IMC is more than synergizing media, but provides an ecological media environment in which the interaction between participants - medium, marketer and

consumer – can be investigated. The need for transforming from traditional marketing communication practices to IMC reveals not merely the advancement of technology, but more importantly, the transformation of people’s mindsets, both from marketers and consumers. IMC, from a media ecological perspective, entails more humanistic and ethical concerns.

In fact, the most controversial and debated issue about IMC practices has been the ethical issue. Advertising in particular has always been questioned and accused as unethical. Postman emphasizes the necessity of studying media and media environment within an ethical context, as he believes that human beings have the intrinsic capabilities of reason and deliberation, as well as different feelings and understanding about their experience.

One of Postman’s biggest concerns is the effect of trivialization. The common practices of IMC, such as advertising, as Postman contends, contribute to the process of trivialization. Postman argues that advertising works best when it’s most irrational, as it has become distant from rationality. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, advertisements were still regarded as serious and rational enterprise whose purpose was to convey valuable information and help consumers make rational claims (*Amusing* 58). However, advertising grows into “one part depth psychology, one part aesthetic theory,” as it moves into image and trivia centered media environment (*Amusing* 60).

McLuhan asserts, “all advertising advertises advertising” (*Probes* 145). The problem with advertising is that all advertisements are good news (*Understanding* 282). Good news is a repeat of the old environment, while bad news is a probe into new environment. Real news is bad news, as bad news reveals the lines of force in an

environment (282). Daniel Boorstin also contends that American culture has experienced a transition from news gathering to news making. A flood of pseudo-events is created with the aid of images simply because people expect more news (9). Boorstin's concern of news making actually characterizes the status quo IMC in today's media environment.

Discussion

Paul Grosswiler suggests that media ecology shows its diversity, breadth, and depth include social and cultural theory in conjunction with media as part of the ecology of communication, because media ecology embraces history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and psychology (22). While people are more interested in content, media ecology puts media in the center of its concern. Media ecology demonstrates from a historical standpoint that media plays influential roles in human capabilities as well as human activities. Media ecology provides a functional approach to investigate IMC. More importantly, media ecology, especially Postman's media ecology, brings ethical judgment to IMC.

Dennis Cali in *Mapping Media Ecology* contends that studying media in the face of cultural and social change is ultimately a study of ourselves (xvii). Besides giving the name to the field, another important aspect of Postman, as Cali points out, is he assigns the moral mission to the study of media ecology (15). Postman calls out McLuhan who views media as neither good nor evil, and asserts that media ecology ought to give moral attention to the role media play in corrupting or purifying our morality. To Postman, it is essential and vital to make ethical judgment towards media and media effects.

Strate comments that media ecology is the best approach to contemplate improvement on the human condition, which takes human nature into consideration (*Amazing* 144). Indeed, it is in the media ecology tradition that recognizes and values human free will and liberty. Media ecologists like Postman strive to make us aware that although technologies have changed our lives extensive, human beings have responsibilities and capacities to fix our problems. Through advertising, Postman walks us through a better understanding of how media and media environment have affected the way we live.

CHAPTER FOUR

POSTMAN'S CRITIQUE OF ADVERTISING

Advertising industry has come a long way over the past centuries. As Postman discusses, advertising was not recognized as an industry until the early twentieth century, but it has already become one of the most consistently successful and profitable enterprises in the world today (*Conscientious* 31). Through the years, advertising has become not only a means to persuasion but an end as well. As Dyer in *Advertising as Communication* claims, advertisements not only sell goods and service, they are commodities themselves (1). Christopher Hackley and Phillip Kitchen argue that modern advertising has evolved into a “Leviathan,” which functions in the same way as what government does in Hobbes (15). Advertising has gained an overall societal effect of circumventing the moral development of citizens (15).

Postman recognizes advertising practices as embedded in certain assumptions of the nature of communication. On the one hand, advertising is an epitome of human communication in a mediated environment. On the other hand, advertising directs how we view what surrounds us and helps paint a picture of the realities that we live in. At the heart of his arguments is a profound understanding of the nature of media and human communication. This chapter is going to review Postman's critique on advertising in detail and attempts to gain a better perspective in understanding how the biases of media and media environment have an extensive influence on IMC practices.

Postman's Critique of Advertising

To assume Postman opposes the idea of advertising is a mistake. Postman acknowledges the benefits of the early advertising, especially in typographic forms, as it facilitates rational minds and implies a serious intellectual culture back in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in America.

From eighteenth century, a sophisticated literary tradition from European culture was gradually nurtured and expanded in the American society. Booksellers first started to use advertisements to promote newspapers and books. Postman contends, as late as 1890, advertisements consisted of mainly words served the purpose of conveying information and making claims in a propositional form (*Amusing* 59). If we take a look at the early ads in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, they were mainly composed in a sentence structure or a paragraph length with simple and straightforward words (*Conscious* 93). A car advertisement provided useful and practical information describing the features about the car. Ads were designed to provide logical information for people to make decisions. And decisions were assumed to be rational. As Ogilvy understands, advertising is not an art form, but a medium for information (7). Advertising sends out a simple message for a single purpose: to sell. Customers should not find advertisements creative, but they can make purchasing decisions based on the information provided (Ogilvy 7). Advertising implies a serious and rational conversation between marketer and consumers.

Although advertising was regarded to move into its modern mode of discourse at the end of the nineteenth century, Postman is concerned that the typographic minds that nurtured in the print culture came to the end. With the intrusion of mass electronic

communication media such as radio and television, modern advertising becomes more accessible to the general public, and embraces more possibilities in terms of both content and format. Nevertheless, Postman is concerned that while the format becomes versatile, the content gets shattered instead. This happens when advertising arena is intruded by massive use of images and photographs first, then by the nonpropositional use of language (*Amusing* 60).

Postman provokes that television advertising is the most serious and dangerous assault on capitalist ideology since the publication of *Das Kapital* (*Amusing* 126). The capitalistic ideology is built on the premise that the manufacturer and consumer engage in a rational enterprise that manufacturers make products according to demand, and consumers make choices based on rational and careful consideration of interests and needs. However, television makes such premise irrelevant in the marketplace.

Television emphasizes image and celebrates trivia. Advertising is to make things look good. As consequences, ads of shampoo and soap are less concern about addressing hair and skin problems, but more about how to increase attractiveness. Cereal ads do not provide information about what the actual ingredients, but talk about childhood memories and family traditions instead. Advertisements, as television becomes the dominant mass medium in the marketplace, no longer aim at making propositional claims about the product, but targeting at people's feeling, emotion, or memory. Postman calls advertising as "one part depth psychology, one part aesthetic theory" (*Amusing* 60).

While marketers endeavor to appeal to people's psychological needs, consumers are trained and cultivated to be indifferent about how and why the product works for them, but only care about "it works". They are not required to use reason and rationality

to make choices, because there is nothing to think about. Just like advertising becomes a form of entertainment in the television media environment, Postman asserts, everything important is likely to be reduced by television to a level of trivial entertainment, from politics, religion, to journalism and education. This is what he means the process of “amusing ourselves to death.”

As much as he is concerned about the intrusion of image in advertising, the non-propositional use of language is what he opposes as well. Slogan is the example of the nonpropositional use of language. To Postman, the invention and application of slogan in advertising marks the fall of rational use of language. Such irrational use of language is identified by Postman as “crazy talk” in his book *Crazy talk, Stupid Talk: How we defeat ourselves by the way we talk* (20). Different from “stupid talk” that does not know what environment it is in, crazy talk is a kind of discourse that creates and sustains an irrational semantic environment.

Postman clarifies that there is no “good” or “bad” language without respect to a specific purpose (*Crazy* 22). The types of sentences used in each semantic environment give us information about the purpose of the environment. Objective and tentative language is good in the semantic environment of science, but it is bad in the context of romantic relationships because language in romantic relationships is supposed to be subjective and emotional. Language can be enemy if one tries to achieve the purpose with words that are not designed to serve them (24). A semantic environment is a product of collective imagination that belongs to tradition, and is fashioned from a society’s experience of what is useful conduct (25). The semantic environment for advertising consists of mostly prescriptive and evaluative statements, which Postman makes a

comparison to religion (69). However, slogans are usually discontinuous and composed of non-propositional words that are designed for appealing to attention and emotions, rather than communication and persuasion.

Problems of Modern Advertising

The influence of advertising on human society has been debated since it appears. While people celebrates the economic prosperity that advertising brings to the marketplace, materialism and consumerism that advertising promotes and facilitates have always been the center of accusation. In fact, with the extensive effect of media, advertising has become more influential on the individual lives as well as the societies.

Image Center

Postman is critical on how media such as the television attack literature, tradition and culture. Radio and television assault early forms of advertising such as newspaper by undermining their revenues (*Conscientious* 62). Furthermore, radio and television alter the structure of leisure activities by making reading unnecessary. The precious reading habit is diminished in importance with the shift of focus to image. One of Postman's biggest concerns is the television cultivates and facilitates a visual culture, in which image replaces words as the central mode of public discourse.

Postman holds the biggest dissent about the television because he finds it renders most problems in its nature to human societies. Television is a kind of medium that by its nature favors visual effects, and makes image the center of its claim. Consequently, it makes the linguistic and rational discourse obsolete. Language used on television has to

accommodate to the visual standard. If language needs to be visual, it has to be interesting and entertaining. Therefore, Postman criticizes that the “magical and even poetic application of language” and image substitute serious reasons as better instruments for communication in television advertisements. Ironically, Postman asserts, the least dangerous thing on television is junk, because on television, entertainment preempts serious contents. Advertising on television is most effective, when it is irrational (*Technopoly* 169).

Propaganda

As *Technopoly* expands, technology affects human societies in more aggressive ways. Advertising today, as Dyer suggests, suffuses the whole system of mass communication (9). However, newspaper advertising is used as necessary and manageable support for information. The gradually developed advertising industry as emerged in the early twentieth century makes advertising especially television advertising both an important method of mass communication, and the most profitable form communication. Postman indicates that as a mass communication practice, advertising provides the legitimate semantic environment for propaganda.

Propaganda, according to Postman, is “language that invites us to respond emotionally, emphatically, more or less immediately, and in an either-or manner” (*Crazy* 170). Such language by nature requires little rationality and reason. Furthermore, it does not invite dialogue. Propaganda can be dangerous because it demands a way of responses that can become habitual; and propaganda has a tendency to work best on groups rather than individuals. Therefore, it has the dangerous effect of turning groups into crowds

(*Crazy* 176). Postman emphasizes that propaganda is especially dangerous when it presents itself as something else, regardless of the cause it represents (*Crazy* 176).

Postman criticizes that the idea that merely saying something will make it true is the fundamental strategy of advertising in America. Advertising industry relies heavily on a population that believes in the “magical powers of words to create realities that do not exist” (*Conscientious* 93). Literary critic Leavis accuses advertising of evoking cheap, almost mechanical emotional responses, and inculcating “the choosing of the most immediate pleasures got with the least effort” (3). He also warns that advertisements corrupted feelings, debased language, exploited people’s emotional needs and fears and encouraged greed, snobbery and social conformity (80). Dyer argues that advertising has become more and more involved in the manipulation of social values and attitudes, and less concerned with the communication of essential information about goods and services (2). Advertising makes people too materialistic by persuading them, that they can achieve certain desirable goals in life through continuous and conspicuous consumption (Dyer 7).

Postman puts forwards that advertising represents a consensus in the marketplace of less concern about what is right about the product, but what is wrong about the customer. Judging from the appearance, it seems that marketers are more concerned about their customers. However, thinking alternatively, it manifests the fact that marketers shift their focus of attention from making good products to making consumers feel good, which contradicts the fundamental ethics of marketers. Such manipulation and devouring of the psyches of consumers in modern advertising is what Postman critical about. Advertising gradually works as an “instant therapy” that makes people believe all

problems have solutions, and all solutions can be found in techniques, technologies and chemistry (*Amusing* 130).

Symbol Drain

In June 2016, a commercial video of a face lifting stick from Korea has garnered over 9 millions views on Facebook in a short time, and comments exploded for purchasing the product. In the video, an old woman simply swiped the stick on the face, and the deep wrinkle lines disappeared. Advertising like this that creates magical effects is apparently not rational and realistic, but it is entertaining enough to catch attention and stimulate interest. As Robey argues, in the competitive Korean skincare market, products cannot just be effective, but they need to deliver a ‘skincaretainment’ experience that entertains, whether through cute or elegant packaging, or ingredients that range from luxurious such as ginseng oil to the intentionally shocking like spider web extract in face cream. In fact, magical effects become very common techniques in advertising industry nowadays. Instead of providing reasonable information, “instant therapy” effect is more effective and accepted. However, it is dangerous to a society or a culture as what it creates and facilitates is simply pseudo-therapeutic narrative, which does not benefit to the welling being of either the individuals or the society intellectually or ethically.

In November 2016, Nordstrom was under fire after advertising a designer hoodie printed with a photograph portraying the Chinese Nanjing Massacre. Lots of people especially Chinese people got so offended and uncomfortable about seeing such a ruthless image on a common consumer good for sale. Nordstrom removed the products after receiving widespread criticism and apologized on social media. The Italian designer

later explained through his social media that he did not possess any evil or malicious intention, rather he wanted to raise awareness to war and peace by using this image. Such case has become common and normative in modern advertising. Cultural symbols such as historic events or historic figures have been largely and intentionally used in today's IMC practices.

Such phenomenon actually bears dangerous implications to human cultures. Just as what the Italian designer defended, lots of people believe there was no malicious intention behind using cultural symbols. However, Postman identifies this as symbol drain. A cultural symbol such as an event, a person, words, or even a date gradually diminishes or loses its serious and significant symbolic value. World War II gets the same value as Star War when it is presented as a theme on T-shirts. Hoodies with the image of Jesus has the same price as Spiderman. People remember Star War series better than the history of WWII; and for children, Jesus has become less attractive than Marvel's superheroes. Cultural symbols diminish their importance in consumer goods, and advertising enables as well as facilitates the process of devaluing the symbols. Repetition is one of the common characteristics of advertising. Postman believes that the more frequently a significant symbol is used, the less potent is its meaning (165). Repetition helps drain the symbolic values of a significant culture symbols.

Moreover, Postman asserts, "the journey to meaninglessness of symbol is a function not only of the frequency with which they are invoked but of the indiscriminate contexts in which they are used" (*Technopoly* 167). The popular catchphrase "Keep Calm and Carry On" is a vivid example. This phrase has been so widely used in all kinds of products and for all kinds of purposes all over the world in today's IMC practices. The

phrase originally appeared as a propaganda poster with two other posters together as a set, issued by the British government during World War II in order to strengthen morale of British people in the event of a large-scale attack or occupation. These three posters were required to be similar in style and feature the symbolic crown of King George VI along with a simple yet effective font with a bold colored background. “Keep Calm and Carry On” was the third poster of the set, which to be issued only upon the invasion of Britain by Germany. In the end, the poster has never been officially displayed to the general public. Not until nearly 60 years later after WWII, a British bookseller found it in his old collections, and it has been available to the general public and been popular ever since.

Technology enables information to be able to spread throughout the world in an unexpected speed. “Keep Calm and Carry On” becomes a world-famous phrase that has been used in all kinds of advertising all over the world. Millions of imitations are created from “keep calm and game on,” to “keep calm and buy shoes” or “keep calm and fake a British accent”. Anyone can make his or her unique phrase using the same semantic structure, font, style and background. Although many imitations still obtain the same tone as the original one that is encouraging and inspiring, lots of them are considered as “parodies” that are intended to be entertaining. It is certain that people still find the original phrase appealing and reassuring in modern times. However, most of them do not know or care about the history behind it. They do not value it as a culture symbol that actually designates a hard time that is unforgettable to many. “Keep Calm and Carry On,” to many people, may carry the same meaning and importance as “May the force be with you” from the script of Star War movie. After the poster got a lot of attention, so did the

bookseller couple. And when asked in an interview about the phenomenon that the poster being so popular, Mary Manley, the bookseller's wife, responded "I didn't want it trivialized; but of course now it's been trivialized beyond belief" (Chu).

Postman would have exactly the same concern. The abusive use of symbols has always been in the center of his critiques about technology and culture. He criticizes the abusive use of symbols such as blasphemy, but he notes that the blasphemy still recognizes the power of symbols. The most dangerous fact of symbol is trivialization (*Technopoly* 165). The trivialization of important cultural symbols is dangerous to human societies because it has no laws; it makes tradition obsolete; and it illustrates a loss of narrative.

Postman believes that a narrative provides meaning that is important to the survival of a culture. Narratives, as Postman understands, are as stories of human history. Those stories such as religion, politics, philosophy as well as science help a culture to organize and develop. Narrative is timeless, as it "gives meaning to the past, explains the present and provides guidance for the future" (172). Narrative is one of the most powerful tools for perceiving our human conditions. Narrative embodies and communicates our values. To say that narrative has been lost is to suggest a dissipation of value, identity, spirituality, and hope. Loss of narrative eventually leads to loss of meaning in life.

Without a legitimate narrative that is rooted in history and culture, these five words are only words, not symbols. Their symbolic value will be diminished or neglected in significance through time and space. Postman contends one picture may be worth a thousand words, but a thousand pictures may worth nothing. Symbols lose their

importance because of how it is used. When a symbol is frequently used such as in form of advertising slogan, its symbolic meaning is devalued. Not because symbol is meaningless, but the form and content of the medium makes it so.

An article on *Time Magazine* addresses the same concern, titled “How Memorial Day Went From Somber Occasion to Summer Celebration” (Fabry). Fabry addresses that Memorial holiday is not celebrated the way as it is supposed. As dedicated to people who died for the country, the holiday is for people to somberly remember the dead while celebrate the joy of victory and life ahead. However, nowadays, when think of Memorial Day, advertisements of Memorial Day sale may come to minds first. Celebration activities such as parade, barbeque and shopping overweigh the remembrance event. Memorial part fades away, but holiday stays. People celebrate Memorial Day not because it is meaningful or important as associated with Civil War or remembrance or patriotism, but because it has been a social affair. The symbolic value of Memorial Day is vanishing.

As Postman suggests, the journey to meaninglessness of symbols is both a symptom and a cause of a loss of narrative. Trivialization makes important cultural symbols impotent and meaningless. “Keep Calm and Carry One” no longer indicates the hard time in Britain during WWII; neither does Memorial Day has a strong association with remembrance of those fought for the country in Civil War. Postman condemns that the loss of narrative is the debilitating consequence of Technopoly’s power (171).

Postman recognizes that cultural abuse like symbol drain could not have occurred without technologies to make it possible and a world-view to make it desirable (171). “Keep Calm and Carry On” is not possible to be widely used all over the world without the introduction of new media - Internet. It is impossible to further develop into a mass

advertising and cultural phenomenon without the new social media environment such as Twitter and Instagram that promote and celebrate creativity and diversity in the technological age. Important symbols obtained their meanings from traditional narratives get obsolete and impotent, not because the emergence of new narratives, but because the adoration of technology pre-empts the adoration of anything else, which is the basic characteristic of Technopoly (165).

Postman does not attribute advertising as the cause of the symbol drain in the public discourse. However, it is the basic way of how advertising functions that makes narrative devalued. Because advertising by its very nature is a media environment that always welcomes and celebrates “the new”. By celebrating “the new,” the tradition inevitably diminishes its importance. Advertising, as Postman contends, is a symptom of a world-view that sees tradition as an obstacle to its claim” (171).

The value of symbols is diminished or lost whenever advertising occurs. Advertising does not seek to supply legitimate narratives to support the new technology or new product. Like the Korean beauty ad, most advertisements are made to be entertaining rather than reasonable, persuasive rather than informative, because the rationale for making these advertisements is to catch attention and ignite interest. New slogan like “keep calm and buy shoes” has no meaning behind it but only to be something new and different in social media. Entertaining effects overshadow and even substitute rational narratives that supply valuable meaning to the products in modern advertising. Advertising is simply a metaphor that illustrates the tear down of the moral center in the media environment.

Media Environment

Postman endeavors to make us aware that we live in two environments. One is the natural environment that provides survival substance and natural resources such as air, water and food. The other is the media environment that consists of language, symbols, and all other communication technologies. Postman points out that people understand how important the natural environment is to human beings' survival on the planet earth; however, the awareness of the media environment is weak. Postman emphasizes that media environment is vital to human beings because it is what "makes us who we are, and makes us better or worse, or smarter or dumber, or freer or more enslaved" (*Conscientious* 18). It is in media environment where human cultures grow and where humanities reside.

The change of advertising documents the change of media. Advertising does not confine the accessibility as it intends to be seen and heard, but medium does. Neither does advertising discriminate the content, but medium does. Internet advertising means nothing to people who do not have access to Internet. People who do not use Instagram will have no idea of how bloggers make ads these days. Medium, as Postman points out, at its most directs what we see and further defines what we know. Like in some countries where media are controlled by the government, people are directed to see what the government allows them to see, and know what the government wants them to know.

The Age of Newspaper

The history of newspaper advertising, as Postman comments, is a metaphor of the descent of the typographic mind in American culture, beginning with reason but ending

with entertainment (58). Newspaper, as one word-centered medium, introduces a new mode of conversation into advertising realm that replaces the word-of-mouth advertising.

Media ecology explains how written words and reading impact one's habit of mind. Postman argues that written words foster analytical thinking while reading encourages rationality (*Amusing* 51). He believes understanding written words and reading require considerable human capabilities such as classifying, analyzing and reasoning. The printed-word has a monopoly on both attention and intellect. They require certain level of engaging and thinking. Words, according to Postman, are not only tools to think with, but also the content of our thoughts. What meaning we give to the world and how we make sense of things around us, derive from our power to name it.

During the time when newspaper and magazine are the dominant forms of advertising, customers are first and foremost readers. The access to written ads is confined to people who possess both the economic capability of purchasing and intellectual capability of reading the material. Newspaper or magazine indicates a new relationship between communication participants, as it requires more engagement of human capabilities in the communication process. The speaker (marketer) is required to use logic and reason to compose the messages, while the listener (customer) is required to use intellectual abilities to make sense of what is delivered. Postman values advertising when people's minds submitted to the sovereignty of the printing press in the eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Thinking in word-centered culture, the age of Exposition, rationality was the path to truth. People need to use reason to find the truth from the information. Living in the Age of Exposition requires people to engage in seriousness

conversation with each other. Therefore, newspaper advertising implies a kind of culture that values serious discourse, rationality and humanity.

The Age of Television

Postman emphasizes that thinking in a word-centered culture is very different from thinking in an image-centered culture, as we can see the transition from newspaper advertising to television advertising. It is not difficult to agree that words will not have the same value in an image-centered culture. People will be more inclined to see a picture of proof rather than believing in the words told in the age of television. However, “seeing is believing” as an epistemological axiom is losing its importance because pictures can now be deceptive due to the very nature and bias of the visual medium, such as photography or television.

Television is a medium that by nature conditions human minds to apprehend the reality through fragmented and incoherent images. Image replaces the word and becomes the center of public discourse. Therefore, politicians and ministers are no longer known or remembered by their words or advocacy, but by their faces and voices. And it becomes so common that products could gain popularity not because of its ingredients, but because of its packaging. Brands are recognized not because of their products, but because of their slogans. Strate comments on images, “while incorporating Technopoly’s reliance on technique in the service of efficiency, commercials are arguably the purest expression of the television medium “ (*Technopoly* 105). On the other side, advertising is able to make the brands known and popular, and at the same time change the way of manufacturing and distribution, and the way people choose products. Mass produced and distributed

products are thought to be more popular, and popularity means better choice for customers. As a result, customers start to turn away from local or family-owned products and choose those well-known products.

Television is a medium that requires less or no intellectual process. It is more of pattern recognition, and the symbolic form of television does not require any special instruction or learning. Postman criticizes that television presents information in a form that is undifferentiated in its accessibility, so that television tends to erase the line between childhood and adulthood by sending the same information to everyone simultaneously (*Conscientious* 155).

Television advertising also showcases the trivialization of significant cultural symbols. Entertaining effects overweigh the traditional narratives. Important cultural symbols are drained in meaning especially through television commercials by pseudo-therapeutic narratives, and by exploiting emotion-appealing language and image, or massive repetition. What is worse, as Postman expounds,

When a culture becomes overloaded with pictures; when logic and rhetoric lose their binding authority; when historical truth becomes irrelevant; when the spoken or written word is distrusted or makes demands on our attention that we are incapable of giving; when our politics, history, education, religion, public information, and commerce are expressed largely in visual imagery rather than words, then a culture is in serious jeopardy. (173)

Danger lies in the fact that when people get accustomed to such visual culture, they gradually lose the patience as well as the ability to process the words. They would lose the ability to distinguish between seriousness and entertainment, because television is

inextricably linked with entertainment and tends to make everything like entertainment. Television reduces our ability to take the world seriously. If newspaper advertising implies a serious and rational mindset, television advertising is more like entertainment, providing pseudo therapy to meet the psychological needs.

The Age of Mobile Phone

With the Internet come into play in the media environment with the development of electronic computers from the mid twentieth century, new metaphors emerge in the digital world. The increasing digitization of the world and the use of the Internet as a means of communication have given rise to new modes of advertising. Mike Smith argues that the development of online advertising has been characterized by rapid growth and ingenious technological innovation (1). Like other advertising media, online advertising is enabled by digital media such as the Internet, the computer, the smartphone, the tablet, and various social media.

While some people still use television as a dominant metaphor to understand the digital environment, such as considering Web as a channel or like a show, Jakob Nielsen suggests we think the new Web technologies in terms of telephony. Although no single metaphor can explain all aspects of a phenomenon as powerful as the Web, Nielsen points out that telephone is the best metaphor for the Web. Mobile phone is a revolutionary medium in the twentieth and twenty-first century that brings significant changes to the mode of communication.

If newspaper asks people to participate in serious conversation through words; television keeps us in constant communication with the world through entertainment;

what does the mobile phone lead us to see? We see people look at their phones when they are eating with friends in the restaurant; they look at their phones when they are waiting in lines. Mobile phone becomes more than a device, but more as a friend for company, an encyclopedia for information, or everything when it comes to emergency.

Mobile advertising reflects the new information problems that Postman pointed out in the article “Science and The Story that We Need” in 1997, namely information glut, incoherent, and meaningless. Mobile advertising is able to penetrate in every aspect of our lives, as the smartphone becomes an increasingly essential communication medium. They appear in the webpages we surf, in the game we play, in the email we read. On the one side, the digital techniques such as HTML 5, data collecting, Cloud and Cookies make it possible for mobile advertising to be audience oriented, meaning it can be customized. If you always make online purchase of clothing, you are more likely to see ads about fashion; if you often view the sports website, you are offered more of sports related ads. However, on the other side, the problem is you are actually confined and limited to choices. You are always directed to see what other people (mostly the machine) want you to see on the devices, and what other people think are important to you. Ads could appear any time without any legitimate context, relevant or irrelevant to our needs, and without permission and selection. The technological ingenuity transforms information into a form of garbage, and we turn ourselves into garbage collectors.

Mobile advertising also changes the social culture, and manifests another form of Postman’s understanding of anti-communication. People do not need to go out of the house to see and get products, while products can be viewed and ordered with one click on the phone any time they want and got delivered to the house. People do not need to

meet and argue with each other, but put a thumb up sign to indicate “read and like”.

Mobile ads illustrate the diminishing importance of the traditional understanding of social life. Dialogue and arguments are closed down as the medium facilitates a sense of individuality under the name of customization.

Discussion

Advertising illustrates what Postman believes as the fundamental theme of media ecology: the medium of communication available to a culture is a dominant influence on the formation of the culture’s intellectual and social preoccupations (*Amusing* 9). The change of advertising metaphors shows how media of communication alters the way information is perceived and how the focus of values is shifted.

Newspaper advertising helps us to see how newspaper as a new medium alters the way of how people get information and perceive information from an oral world. Information is no longer fleeting in the air, but staying on the paper. Therefore, printing words requires and decides a society that values words, reading, and literacy, and a culture that cultivates rational habits of mind and facilitate serious discourse.

The typographic mind of thinking did not come to the end until the intrusion of television. Postman believes that new media that enter the electronic age such as television followed the steps of telegraphy and photography. Telegraph attacked the typography’s definition of discourse by making information a commodity that does not tie to any function it may serve. The value of formation was no longer judged by how well it supported the purpose. Instead, information could be valuable only because it raised curiosity or interest.

Postman points out, both photography and telegraphy recreates the world as a series of idiosyncratic events (*Amusing* 73). Reality is atomized, incoherent, and fragmented, so is the way of thinking. Telegraphy and photography challenge the traditional definition of information, and the ways we perceive information. Information is no longer implying a serious connection to its function. The concept of means to the end diminishes the importance, as the means by itself becomes the end to some extent. The sense of “purpose” is trivialized and fading, and why we do things, and why we do things the certain ways become less concerned.

Image-centered media facilitates a “peek-a-boo” culture in which events happen and vanishes in fast speed without much coherence or sense, and entertainment takes the center of the culture (77). The problem and danger that Postman tries to address is that to live in a “peek-a-boo” world cultivates a corresponding epistemology that values image over word, expediency over necessity, fragment over context, and entertainment over rationality. Such epistemology does not fully emerge until television, and is dangerous to humanity.

Television is “the command center of the new epistemology” (*Amusing* 78). Television directs not only our knowledge of the world, but our knowledge of ways of knowing. Our choice and use of other media are orchestrated by television, because people spend most of time watching television and get information about which book to read, which store to go from television.

Mobile advertising as a new form transforms the advertising industry into a Postmodern mode of discourse, which focuses on customized experience, individuality and spontaneity. Such transformation is only possible because of the new mobile devices,

such as mobile phone, tablet and laptop. As Doug Stephens states, mobile advertising requires a completely different approach to anything that's come before it. Mobile device is considered intrinsically different from the previous media such as newspaper and television, as it brings back a one-to-one mode of communication. It also differs from newspaper and television that the mobile medium is entirely location and context agnostic. More than a type of marketing, mobile advertising is really a completely new format of spatially and contextually driven communication.

Like McLuhan's laws of media, Postman offers a list of properties that summarize his understanding of media change in a talk titled "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change" delivered in Denver in 1998. Postman says, the first thing about all technological change is that it is always a trade-off. By saying this, Postman alerts that for everything advantage technology brings, there will be disadvantage as well. This directly leads to his second idea that every new technology benefits some people while harms others. The effect of technological change happens in uneven ways (2). The third thing about technological change is that every technology has its own philosophy that directs how people use their minds and bodies, and how they perceive and understand their world, which is what McLuhan's "the medium is the message" indicates (3). Postman's fourth idea argues that technological change is not additive but ecological (4). That is why Postman alerts that we must be cautious about technological innovation, because the consequences of technological change are always vast, often unpredictable and largely irreversible. The fifth thing we need to know is: "media tend to become mythic" (4). There is a common understanding of technological creations as if they were God-given, and as if they were a part of the natural order of things (4). Postman points

out that such idea is very dangerous, because if people take that as a given, then there will be no control over it. People will just accept it without thinking about it seriously.

Media change leads to the shifting metaphors of advertising. Advertising demonstrates that as a new medium enters into the media environment, such as the television or the mobile phone, it changes the ecology of advertising. Advertising as a metaphor makes media ecology explicit and brings media ecology to life. Silverstone argues in *Why Study the Media* indicates that media have changed our lives radically, enabled and equipped by the development of technology (4). The change of media affects how people perceive and make sense of what is happening around them. It changes how we process information and acquire knowledge, therefore changes how people think and behave. That's why media ecology is a functional approach to understand human activities, because as Postman proposes, we study media is "to further our insights into how we stand as human beings, how we are doing morally in the journey we are taking" (*Humanism* 16).

CHAPTER FIVE

RECONFIGURING IMC IN THE CURRENT MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

THE AGE OF SMARTPHONE

Postman's critique of advertising provides us a functional lens to understand IMC practices through understanding media. Postman makes us aware that communication media have significant impact in the formation of a culture's social and intellectual preoccupations by thinking media as metaphors. Therefore, as a social practice, IMC has been inevitably affected by the changing mediated environment, as Schultz et al. define IMC as a response to the marketplace taking into account the changes of communication environment (xiii). Postman's media ecology perspectives explain how changing media environments affect IMC practices. Postman makes us to contemplate IMC more than merely an integration of media. He asks us to take an epistemological assessment to see the interplay between human beings and media.

This chapter is going to apply Postman's media ecology perspectives and look into IMC in today's mediated environment. As it becomes increasingly dominant in the current communication media, how the smartphone reconfigures IMC by redefining important components of IMC practices and by facilitating a new epistemology deserves a close look. Moreover, Postman offers prescient insights for us to understand the problems of IMC in today's media environment that are implicit and often ignored.

The New Medium

Enabled by digital and mobile technology, the Internet and computers entered into the realm of communication from the late 20th century after electronic technology. The

Internet and computers have made drastic changes in every aspect of communication environment. A smartphone is fundamentally an Internet-enabled computer that fits in palm and pocket. Although the history of the mobile phone went back to the early 20th century, it did not make significant influence until Apple introduced the Iphone into the consumer market in 2007. It is widely recognized that the debut of Iphone marks a new stage in the history of human communication – the age of smartphone.

According to the global attitude survey in 2015, the highest rates of the smartphone ownership are among the richer economies surveyed, which includes 88% of South Koreans, 77% of Australians, 74% of Israelis, 72% of Americans and 71% of Spaniards (Poushter). Boston Consulting Group (BCG) 2015 report *The Mobile Revolution: How Mobile Technologies Drive a Trillion-Dollar impact* reveals, as the cost of smartphone decreases to as little as \$40, the value consumers place on mobile technology ranges from \$700 to \$6,000 per user. And the aggregate annual consumer value for mobile technologies reaches \$6.4 trillion above the cost of devices and services across the six surveyed countries including the U.S., Germany, South Korea, Brazil, China and India (Bezerra et al.). BCG asserts, globally, mobile technology has emerged as a primary engine of economic growth, stimulating enormous private-sector spending in both R&D and infrastructure, and profoundly changing daily lives everywhere (Bezerra et al.).

No doubt, the smartphone extends the concept of phone. Phones are no longer only for traditional communication activities such as calling or texting. 2015 Pew Research Center survey shows Americans are now using their phones for a variety of nontraditional phone activities, such as looking for a job, finding a date or reading a book

(Rainie and Perrin). The metaphor of smartphone has been expanded to clock, calendar, calculator, translator, notebook, map, wallet, travel agent, shopping cart and many more you can name. To many people, it is no longer only a communication medium with family and friends, but where their social networks exist, where their knowledge come from, and where their connections with the world resides. Not only does the smartphone itself become a daily necessity, the use of other media is orchestrated by the use of the smartphone. People nowadays read books, watch TV and listen to radio on smartphones. A smartphone largely amplifies the use and effect of computer, as it makes possible for people to conduct computer- and Internet-enabled activities in their palms at their own convenience. As it becomes increasingly favorable and thus dominant in our communication environment, it is not exaggerated to say that nowadays we not only live with the smartphone, but live in the smartphone.

The age of smartphone illustrates computer's sovereignty over the whole range of human activities, as Postman prophesized 20 years ago (*Technopoly* 111). Postman says that as people have accorded their customary mindless inattention, they will use it as they are told, without a whimper (*Amusing* 161). The smartphone indeed suggests a new relationship between human beings and machines - that human beings become "information processors" (*Technopoly* 111). The underlying implication of such relationship is vicious and dangerous, because it assumes computers think better than human beings; it also dehumanizes while human autonomy and human creativity are in danger of being suppressed or impaired. Ironically, it is not an outcome of natural selection, but a result of human choice. Having smartphone-dependence simply reflects the culture of Technopoly. Postman foresees such consequence as he considers the

computer as the “quintessential, incomparable, near-perfect machine for Technopoly” (111).

Over the years, we have seen and experienced radical changes in our communication environment due to the introduction of new media. The fact is, however, the displacement of media occurs when a new and more technological medium replaces the older less technological medium. It has become natural to human societies when we generally accept the new medium as more advanced than older ones, because the rationale behind a new medium is based on its ability to solve the problems that older ones are unable to solve. The progress of media has been largely defined by technological advancement.

Postman would agree the displacement of media turns out to be a perfect paradigm of Technopoly. Postman realizes that when a new medium enters into the communication environment, the situation is two opposing worldviews - the technological and the traditional, coexist at first. Nevertheless, Technopoly by its very nature eliminates alternatives. Thus, Technopoly makes the less technological medium obsolete by making the related traditional thought-world disappear or being irrelevant (48). While people are obsessed with the new media, history, tradition, humanity and ethics are likely to be in danger. Postman’s media ecology provides a useful approach for us to explore IMC in today’s media environment. It helps explain the changes of IMC that we are experiencing; it also helps us discover the problems in IMC that we might not have been aware of.

The Status Quo IMC

IMC has gone through changes in different media environments. The smartphone reconfigures IMC by redefining the essential components in IMC such as media synergy and information environment.

Media Synergy

IMC is common understood as an integrated approach to media. One of the key components of IMC is media synergy. IMC aims to synergize multi-media channels to keep a consistent message to internal and external audiences. Generally, IMC practitioners believe that the impact of the media in combination with other media is more powerful. One of the key contributions of media ecology is to provide insights on the interplay between media. McLuhan states “no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media” (43). Media interact among themselves as “radio changed the form of the news story as much as it altered the film image in the talkies. TV caused drastic changes in radio programming, and in the form of the thing or documentary novel” (78). Postman extends the idea by arguing that when a new medium is powerful in taking over the center of communication environment, it induces other media to do what it does, and eventually the total information environment begins to mirror the medium (*Amusing* 111).

Strate contends that the invention of a new technology may be largely driven by the existence of an older one (*Media Ecology* 136). Writing, for example, is driven by spoken words; printing press cannot be possible without the existence of paper and innovations in metallurgy. This is what McLuhan calls to look at the present through a

rear-view mirror. McLuhan understands media are extensions of human faculties; a new medium is an extension or amplification of an older one.

Postman disputes McLuhan's generalization by arguing that television as a new medium does not extend or amplify the former literate culture; instead it attacks it (84). However, Postman points out that television, even if it attacks literate culture from the age of print, it is a continuation of a tradition inherited from the age of telegraph and photograph (84). Television extends and amplifies the epistemological biases of telegraph and photograph favoring image and trivia. What Postman's media ecology propels is a more dialectical understanding of media. We must be prudent in either praising or condemning a medium, and judge it in a historical and social context. Typography, for example, facilitated the modern sense of individuality, but at the same time it destroyed the traditional sense of community. Realizing there are always tradeoffs or even dangers embedded in a new technology is a sense of "media conscious" that Postman encourages. It helps us avoid generalization and simplification, and be critical and reflective.

Postman's media ecology indicates that a medium has embedded capability to create and sustain a particular epistemology by favoring particular kinds of contents. People are usually not conscious that when they use a medium, they are provided a particular lens to see through things. They can only see what the medium is capable of showing, and know what the medium allows them to know. As Strate contends, media are as environments that define the range of possible actions we can take, and facilitate certain actions while discouraging others (*Amazing* 135). Jonathan Bignell believes that the new digital and interactive media have strong claims to be decisively different from

the predecessors, and they constitute the basis of a distinctively postmodern media culture (15).

Another important perspective of Postman's media ecology is that he understands media change as gradual and additive at first, but ecological at the end. When change reaches a critical mass at a certain point, it changes the character of the symbolic environment (*Amazing* 27-28). Just as the amount of dust in the air reaches a point makes it from air to pollution. Postman calls our attention to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when human society is in the age of electronic media. Telegraph and photograph indeed called a "peek-a-boo" world into existence. Although every media that entered the electronic environment followed and amplified the biases of telegraph and photograph, it was when television entered the media environment and amplified the epistemological biases of telegraph and photograph to a critical mass point that "raising the interplay of image and instancy to an exquisite and dangerous perfection" (78). Television changes the character of the social environment by takes the command center of all communication media, as well as by creating a prevailing then dominant epistemology. The epistemology of television directs how we use other media.

Smartphones are no doubt the "critical mass" in our current communication environment. However, it is worth noting that other media such as word-of-mouth, television, radio or newspaper and magazine have not been completely eliminated in IMC practices. On the contrary, consumers have an unprecedented number of media to choose from in order to research and shop for products and services. Therefore, how should IMC respond to such situation? Postman's discussion of television offers insights. Postman states, in the age of television,

When television teaches magazines that news is nothing but entertainment, magazines have taught television that nothing but entertainment is news.

Television programs, such as ‘Entertainment Tonight’ turn information about entertainers and celebrities into “serious” cultural content, so that the circle begins to close: Both the form and content of news become entertainment. (*Amusing* 112)

The same applies to the age of smartphone. The smartphone simply redefines the media environment by making other media towards digital and mobile mode.

Television is still considered as an important IMC environment in the age of smartphone. According to CNBC, television is still the most dominant advertising medium that attributes to 37% of global advertising spend in 2015. Association of National Advertisers in its 2018 research still suggests television as a valuable and worthy channel for brand marketers. Big companies such as Netflix, Apple or Amazon still spend big budgets on television ads, because television is still thought to work as the most effective brand awareness medium and the most trust worthy channel in the minds of consumers today. Nevertheless, television still has to accommodate to the increasingly dominant mobile environment, by making itself available for people to watch on the smartphone. Book, newspaper and magazine are made available online, so people can read on the smartphone. Radio is also made available online, so people can listen on the smartphone.

The smartphone makes cyberspace a vital marketplace for IMC. Companies like Uber, Lyft, and Yelp serve only the smartphone users. More and more companies give advantage to the smartphone users. U.K. clothing company Farfetch offers discount

exclusively to consumers who purchase through smartphones. U.S. travel company Priceline offers special deals that can only be seen and purchased through smartphones. In China, a mobile app called WeChat has dominated the realm of communication in almost all aspects. WeChat users can do a lot of other tasks besides sending messages and making calls, including play games, send money to people, make video calls, order food, read the news, pay utility bills, and many more. Most companies in China use WeChat official accounts to send ads and promotional messages to consumers, which has become the new practice of IMC. Moreover, there are growing numbers of companies give extra discounts to Wechat payment – an online payment method that is available only with the smartphone. Media synergy, in fact, in today’s media environment is primarily organized and orchestrated by the use of the smartphone.

Information Environment – Trivia and Chaos

To understand the metaphorical function of a medium, Postman suggests, we must take into consideration of information (*Amusing* 14). The smartphone affects IMC practices by redefining our concept and experience of information. As Julie Cohen indicates, “markets are fluid and interconnected, information services sit within complex media ecologies” (375). In fact, Postman has provided us with an outlook of what’s information will be like 20 years ago. Television alters the meaning of “being informed” by disinformation, which gets amplified in the age of smartphone (*Amusing* 107).

Information in today’s media environment can be anything that ignites interest. It can be something trivial like everyday routine to something simply meaningless but entertaining, strange or bizarre. Blogger’s ootd -outfit of the day- is considered as useful

information; “what I eat in a day” on YouTube becomes meaningful content. In 2014, “Mukbang” rose as a national fad from South Korea. Mukbang is short for muk-neun-bang-song- Korean translated to “eating broadcast,” is basically people live broadcasting their eating online. Some Mukbangers eat normal meals while answer viewers’ questions, while some other Mukbangers simply indulge in immense quantities of food such as dozens of burgers or piles of crab legs. The fascinating thing is millions of people are waiting for those Mukbang shows every night, among which lots of them are willing to pay for watching. Many Mukbangers make great amount of money from virtual tokens on the platform where they broadcast or from advertising sponsorships. Rationales given to such fad include eating is especially a social activity in Korea; or watching Mukbang brings mental satisfaction to people who are lonely or on a diet. Still, the Mukbang phenomenon is not possible without the current media environment.

Frances Cha from CNN contends platform makes such phenomenon possible in the first place. Korea has the largest smartphone ownership in the world, and people do lots of things with smartphones on the move. Mukbang is something that satisfies those minds who want to be entertained. According to Cha, with 78.5% of the entire population on smartphones and 7 million people riding the Seoul subway network every day, online platforms such as Afreeca TV are becoming particularly popular with Korean commuters, given that the Seoul subway has cellphone reception and Wi-Fi, and South Korean smartphones have TV streaming capabilities.

The smartphone also alters the quantity and speed of information. Information is now created, and dispersed beyond the traditional expectation of time and space. Take news as an example. If in the past, news is about something happened, news today is

about something happening. If in the past, news is about what's happening locally, local news could have a global influence in a few seconds today. "Live," "instant," "spontaneous" and "convenience" become the new metaphors for time and space in today's media environment.

Surprisingly, an instant society was prophesized by Postman almost 40 years ago. He realized the rapid emergence of an all-instant society: instant therapy, instant religion, instant food, instant friends, even instant reading" (*Teaching* 76). Thom F. Gencarelli argues that technology enslaves people through its distortion of consciousness of time and space. Postman believes that the plausibility of instancy as a way of life comes from the "world view" advanced by information environment (76). People are given the impression that they are able to acquire as much information as they want, whenever they want and where they want. However, "information has become a form a garbage, not only incapable of answering the most fundamental human questions but barely useful in providing coherent direction to the solution of even mundane problems" (*Technopoly* 69).

If information is still at least a paragraph length with explanations on newspaper and elaborations on television, it has been abbreviated to a title length or a feed in the current smartphone dominant environment. News becomes a worse case of trivia as they appear as headlines just like slogans in advertising. Actually, Postman recognizes that news took the form of slogans back in the age of telegraph. To Postman, the problem of headlines is in its language as sensational, fragmented and impersonal (70). News like slogans are "to be noted with excitement, to be forgotten with dispatch" (70). The smartphone extends the telegraph environment, in which anything including news is to be

noted with excitement, and to be forgotten with dispatch. Knowledge means knowing of lots of things, not knowing much about them.

Postman will oppose the idea of using Twitter or Instagram as a rational means for communication. Not only because the information is always broken and inconsistent, which is a form of non-propositional use of language that he criticizes; but also because the simplification leads to trivialization of important contents. As Andrew Essex argues, “the feed becomes our new media Main Street, the boulevard of boundless content” (38). Within the limited time and space, people are compelled as never before trying to be entertaining and interesting (39). The problem is not that people talk about serious problems using entertaining language. The problem, as Postman would argue, is in that people do not know what is serious and what is not. People make fun of religious activities and they do not realize it hurt some people’s feelings. It has become so common in the current IMC practices that history is distorted and cultural symbols are trivialized in order to provide more entertaining and appealing effects.

Christy Wampole in *The Other Serious* claims that “life feels too light” nowadays (2). What she provokes is an awareness of the fact that there is a distinct flimsiness to many aspects of contemporary culture in today’s world, which is filled with “busyness, empty chatter, and disposable experiences” (3). Wampole urges a sense of seriousness, with which human beings are intrinsically different from animals and human societies still run under logic and reason. Such seriousness can also be found in Postman, as he asks us to keep distance with media so we can understand it, judge it and ultimately control it (163).

An ancient Chinese saying indicates excess is just as bad as deficiency. In the digital and mobile media environment, the threshold of communication has been significantly lowered. Communication participants grow in large amount, while information is easy to be created and dispersed. The consequence, as we have seen in today's media environment, are information becomes increasingly trivialized and the quality of communication is degraded. Consumers' attention is highly dispersed, and people become increasingly frivolous and thoughtless.

What we are experiencing in today's IMC practices illustrates what Postman regards as "information chaos" (*Technopoly* 60). Facilitated by the smartphone environment, we are provided with all kinds of information, from relevant to irrelevant, interesting to boring, meaningful to shallow, rational and irrational. The status quo of IMC practices, as Al Ries and Laura Ries contend, has lost its power as a brand-building tool since it has lost its credibility with consumers, who are increasingly skeptical of its claims (xvi). The distrust towards marketers and brands emerges naturally when information becomes a form of garbage and when people do not feel "being informed."

Essex in *The End of Advertising* argues, "the media business, which had bloated to historic proportions via new platforms piling up on top of old ones, was filling the world with a relentless array of content, much of it ever noisier" (35). Information in today's environment is not only garbage with little value, but even worse. It has become objectionable noise. Noise initiates antipathy. The flourish of Ad block industry proves that what people need is not more information, and "less is more" is an acquired wisdom.

Postman warns that information chaos is an inevitable product of *Technopoly*. *Technopoly* drives people to fill their lives with information and more information. Thus,

when a society seeks information and more information to satisfy its needs, it fundamentally speaks the language of Technopoly. Information becomes both the means and the end of human creativity (*Technopoly* 61).

Postman argues that all societies have institutions and techniques that function as immune systems. Their purpose is to maintain a balance of the organic and ecologic system, by destroying unwanted information. Sometimes, social institutions manage the system simply by denying people's access to information, such as what Chinese government currently does. However, the problem of information chaos happens when a culture tries to employ technology itself as a means of providing direction and purpose to human activities. Technopoly is a form of cultural AIDS – Anti Information Deficiency Syndrome (*Technopoly* 63). The idea of thinking information as blessing and “through its continued and uncontrolled production and dissemination offers increased freedom, creativity, and peace of mind” is what Postman opposes and worries about (71). The fact is that information does none of these things but create more problems.

While Postman admits the media has been advanced and sophisticated by technologies over time, to think technological advancement is synonymous with moral, social and psychic progress in human society is dangerous (*Building* 41). On one hand, information glut and information trivia makes it hard for people to distinguish between true and false. On the other hand, as public and private space is increasingly blurred, the sense of “the other” is diluted. However, the public sphere plays an important role in human society because it is where we observe and learn to interact with people who are different from us. It's where we come to know “the other.” In the age of smartphone, “the other” loses its significance as the self becomes more central the concern. It is arguable

that the metaphor of mobile technologies especially the smartphone actually close down communication and makes people distant from each other both physically and psychologically.

The Epistemology of The Smartphone

Media ecology has a tradition in understanding epistemology. Postman asks us to be aware of how our concepts of knowledge and truth have been altered, and “how the bias of a medium sits heavy, felt but unseen, over a culture” (*Amusing* 18). Not from a perspective of relativism, Postman makes moral judgment on the epistemologies created by different media, and he contends epistemology created by television is absurd and dangerous to social life (27). The smartphone extends and amplifies the epistemological biases of the television and computer, and cultivates a new kind of mobile mind.

Television epistemology shows a substantial dependence on information. Information is where the knowledge comes from and where the truth resides. The importance of information has been preserved, but the way to get information has been changed. Instead of reading page by page of newspapers, people now get informed by mobile sources. According to Pew Research Center, as of early 2016, the percentage of people across all age groups who get news from print newspaper has decreased from 2013. Compared with print, people are reported to get news online now, either from news websites and apps, or both. A recent survey discloses that people who prefer to watch news still choose TV as the primary news platform, although mobile news consumption continues increasing rapidly. It is also reported that the portion of Americans who get news on a mobile device has gone up from 54% in 2013 to 72% in 2016.

Countries like China have different media platforms and regulations; nevertheless the media ecology appears to be quite similar. As Chong Han argues, the news landscape in China now is shifting from traditional media outlets to the Internet and mobile media outlets, since “more and more people are turning to computers, mobile phones and other devices to keep themselves informed of what is happening in the world” (1). Pew Research Center further reveals that most Americans still believe family and friends are important ways of getting news. People consider news from family and friends is more relevant to their interests as compared to other sources. Among various news sources, the trust toward social media is substantially lower.

If, as Postman argues, television epistemology still asserts, “seeing as believing,” then what do the smartphone users believe? Certainly, they do not believe in “seeing,” because “seeing” can be deceptive especially with all the editing applications on the phone. Information can be easily edited or garbled. Then, do they believe in “reading”? Reading culture has unfortunately been distant to the smartphone users, as the span of attention required for reading is not cultivated by the smartphone. Do they believe in “thinking”? Nicholas Carr discusses in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* that when you read on the Internet, there is no continuous, coherent stream from one source. The fact is brains simply do not assimilate the information in a rich and meaningful way. As Carr puts it bluntly, people have become mindless consumers of data (35). The epistemology of “the real” “the right” and “the good” is rather frail. People’s minds can be changed suddenly by a sudden trivial event they get from social media; and a “fact” can be overturned with no time with other facts.

Such epistemology contributes to the prevailing issue of pervasive distrust in today's marketplace. As Schultz et al. state, from a consumer's standpoint, there is no difference between an advertisement, a promotion and a public relation event. To consumers, they are all considered as the information from marketers. Therefore, people's skepticism towards advertising actually reflects the lost of credibility of IMC in general.

Fast-food culture is a vivid metaphor that pictures how people today keep themselves informed and look knowledgeable in the age of smartphone. Studies show that fast-food culture is driving people to rush through life in search of instant gratification. Everything is supposed to be fast to get and simple to understand. As a result, people are no longer interested in reading lengthy detailed contents. Instead, they turn to sources that provide immediate and concise information. Search engine becomes an essential device to many as it provides immediate and concise responses. Browsing becomes the new reading, while information mostly appear in the form of feeds. Major social media facilitate such simplicity. Twitter has a limit of words, so message has to be composed within 144 characters; Instagram has a limit of 10 photos per post, so the story telling has to be concise.

People nowadays rarely read books. Nevertheless, they still could present themselves as philosophy savvies on social media. It has been so common to see a photo with a sentence of wisdom on it such as "the only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing. By Socrates." People enthusiastically make reference to this quote as if they have learned it. However, little do they know about Socrates, or Plato, or *Apology*. Fast-food culture is just like fast food that it satisfies the immediate needs but in a unhealthy

and unsustainable way. And that is exactly what technology is good at - bringing convenience to the once complicated human activities, and solving sophisticated human problems with simple solutions. Shortcut can be efficient, but at the end of the road, there is likely a detour.

The smartphone has made social media the essential component of today's mediated environment, so that social media has become one of the major sources where people feel informed and get knowledge. According to Franklin Foer, sixty-two percent of Americans get their news through social media nowadays (6). Besides getting news, sharing news in social media has also become a phenomenon of increasing social, economic and political importance because individuals can participate in news production and diffusion in large global virtual communities (Lee and Ma). Sujata Ramnarayan contends that social media today can be considered as the synonymous of traditional "word-of-mouth" (i). Post, tweet and comment become the new forms of "word-of-mouth" in the age of smartphone and are increasingly influential in IMC practices.

In November 2017, it is reported that the U.S. TV reality show star Kim Kardashian sold \$10 million worth of her brand of perfume in one day. The number of sales is considered incredible by industry standards as compared to the sales of traditional beauty companies such as Estee Lauder or Lancôme. The most astonishing fact is that they accomplished the number without any traditional marketing, which means no print ads or TV commercials, no sample product in the magazine, no department store associates, no free gift with purchase and so forth. As a matter of fact, this is not the first time that Kardashian-Jenner family startles the market. According to Vogue magazine, the youngest daughter Kylie Jenner has always achieved million-dollar sales of her

cosmetic products within minutes with no traditional marketing. Kelly-Leigh Cooper explains that Kylie Cosmetics are unlike other competitors, “it doesn’t seem to need it”. Kylie Cosmetics is different from their most competitors that they are not sold in stores and do not advertise traditionally. Their primary channel for marketing is through their social media accounts. Their strategy is considered as a direct-to-customer strategy. Cooper adds, Kylie’s success can be viewed squarely within larger trends in the global beauty industry, which has undergone a huge shift as social media influencers and vloggers become more important to a brand’s success.

As Ramnarayan states, in today’s IMC practices, customers persuade or dissuade other customers, and it happens primarily through social media (2). Before the social webs, people get recommendations or suggestions from family members or friends; but now, people get the similar information from people they have never met or never known. It has become common that people buy products based on customer reviews and ratings. In today’s IMC, reviews are especially valued by marketers as they directly or indirectly lead to rankings, and rankings affect sales. That is why Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has become an important and profitable segment for technology companies like Google, Baidu and Amazon, because it makes people feel trustworthy.

The problem is as what Jose van Dijck, Thomas Poell and Martijin de Waal argue in *Platform Society*, “the creation of public value toward the common good is often confused with the creation of economic value serving a nondescript amalgam of private and public interests” (23). Unfortunately, there are always obfuscations behind claims for the common good. Facebook, for example, claims to help make people connected and facilitate communication all over the world. However, Facebook was investigated by

Federal Trade Commission for 50 million users' private information misused by a political U.K. consultancy firm during the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaigns. And in 2018, United Nation investigators blamed Facebook for playing a leading role in possible genocide in Myanmar by spreading hate speech online. Perhaps, not all connections are good, as Facebook also connects people with fake news, with hate speech, with what Postman calls “disinformation”.

As Franklin Foer points out in *World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech*, companies such as Facebook and Google have created a world where the old boundaries between fact and falsehood have eroded, where misinformation spreads virally (7). Dijck enunciates in the lecture “from a culture of connectivity to a platform society,” when technology companies claim that technology merely enables or facilitates social activity, however, “making the web social” means “making sociality technical” in reality.

Indeed, media environment today is increasingly characterized by large technology companies, who on the one side, successfully capture a large share of attention in the marketplace and society, and on the other side, are increasingly central to the distribution of information. As John Cheney-Lippold criticizes, companies like Google will continue to have extraordinary power over our present and future by using their algorithms and our data to produce a dynamic world of knowledge (11). Foer in *World Without Mind* vividly provides us with a picture of what large tech companies such as Apple and Google are in a competition of: they want to wake us in the morning, have their artificial intelligence software guide us through the day, and never quite leave our sides (2). They strive to become the repository for precious and private items, such as our

calendar, contacts, our photos and documents. This might sound unbelievable 20 years ago, possible 10 years ago, but real today. Google Home, Google glass, Apple Watch, and Amazon Alexa have implanted their artificial intelligence not only in our lives, but in our bodies and minds. As Foer warns, they intend for us to unthinkingly turn to them for information and entertainment, while they build unabridged catalogs of our intentions and aversions (2).

This is exactly what sits at the center of Postman's concern about how humanity has been threatened by and surrendered to technology. Foer points out that tech monopolies aspire to mold humanity into their desired images (2). More and more people now talk to "Google" or "Alexa" to turn off their lights at home instead of asking their spouses or children to do so. Single people are now relying more and more on mobile devices to monitor their pets at home than asking their roommates or neighbors for help. People believe online maps more than their memories; believe the number of temperature shown on weather app than they actually feel; believe the result of Google search than their own acquired knowledge. In an increasingly technical society, as Postman foresees, "people would come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think" (xix). While new technologies make lives convenient and easy, as Foer worries, human beings are in risk of abandoning creativity and privacy, and losing autonomy and individuality (3).

The danger lies in the bias of the medium. The smartphone amplifies the bias of computer that making humans as machines. Therefore, human will and human creativity are irrelevant and ignored. By its nature, it celebrates affluence and trivia. It does not require as much comprehension or reflection. Since it does not offer a basis for believing,

there is a lack of criteria and moral center to make judgment. Eventually, people are accustomed and adapted to affluence and trivia. Consequently, habituated in such environment facilitates a thoughtless, imprudent and none-reflective state of mind.

Muted Problems

Manipulation

Until the era of digital media, the messages from newspaper, book, radio, television could be controlled by the original senders. Therefore, the marketers possess more power in the marketplace. Consumers have no ideas of what the products will be until they are notified and advertised by the marketers. However, in the age of smartphone, since everyone can be a creator or modifier of content, consumers have become more powerful than ever before in making influence. No doubt, the marketplace has been increasingly consumer-driven, as Schultz et al. state, the value of IMC resides in what consumers think of a brand. Thus, understanding what consumers think is believed to be the key to IMC practices.

In 2018, Robert J. Meyer and Shiri Melumad from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania partnered with Clicktale to conduct “The truth behind smartphone behavior” research into human behavior on smartphones. The research uncovered the existence of a distinct psychology prompted by the use of the smartphone. The main finding of the research indicates “when consumers have a smartphone in their hand, they are characterized by a rather distinct psychological “mobile mindset” — a safe-zone escapist world within which they seek solace, comfort and relaxation”. Due to the relaxed comfort of a safe zone, the smartphone usage fosters a preference for

entertaining content, such as pop culture, sport and even “guilty pleasure,” rather than science, facts or hard news.

The research also finds that smartphone users demonstrate a preference for content offering immediate gratification, such as coupons and clearance items. The research also found that smartphone users would be more willing to pay a premium for a personalized shopping service. On average, smartphone users are willing to pay 6.5% more for fast shipping compared to desktop users. Melumad adds that smartphone use makes people less socially minded and more self-focused, and “it’s characterized by a desire to be entertained and a need for fast personalized content”. Highlighting the individualistic nature, smartphone users are less likely to donate through give-back programs and less likely to purchase gifts, compared to desktop users. “Mobile mindsets” indicate that people grow increasingly self-centered in the age of smartphone.

Olapic and Movable Ink partnered to conduct another research on ecommerce buying behavior across the industry. The research identified that customers over the course of 2015 have become as self-centered as ever before, which means customers expect nothing less from brands now. The research also indicates that 54% of consumers say they would consider ending a retail relationship if they are not given tailor-made or relevant content (Jesus). Brands are no longer what they say they are, but what their customers think they are.

Robert Williams contends “mobile mindset” provides insights into how people turn to their smartphones for comfort, entertainment and immediate gratification, and how marketers must better tailor their mobile experiences to customer mindsets. Sasha

Fedorenko also suggests the way to attract the customers in the current mediated environment is “be entertaining”.

“Be entertaining” is what Postman attributes to the age of showbiz, to the character of television, and the epistemology created by television. However, Postman’s understanding of “be entertaining” has more depths. There is no problem of television being entertaining if they are supposed to. The problem of being entertaining lies in the fact that television makes entertainment “the natural format for the representation of all experience,” meaning everything presented on television is experienced as entertainment (*Amusing* 87). Thus, politics become entertaining when it needs to be serious; education becomes inconsequential when it should be imperative.

Likewise, we all enjoy humorous and funny ads as well as novel ideas, so IMC “being entertaining” is viable in certain context. However, problems arise, as Postman would agree, when entertainment becomes the metaphor for all practices in IMC. As a result, a public relation press conference will be a show, whether it addresses any problem or concern is not important. Trivialization and controversy in advertising can be accepted as long as they are interesting. This is problematic because it simply implies that marketers assume what people want and need is to be entertained, while they do not assume rationality as fundamental and necessary, and ignore that human beings have the intrinsic will to pursue meaning in their lives.

One of the trending practices in IMC today is that marketers have become aware of the fact that connecting brands with a cause can be a powerful way in today’s marketplace, as marketers believe the right cause creates an emotional tie between the product and its consumers. Small business like a gym claims to donate to a breast cancer

charity when the consumers buy products. World famous corporation Louis Vuitton claims to donate \$100 to UNICEF after a consumer purchases their lock-it bracelet.

Not only with a cause, marketers today more and more intentionally associate their brands with controversies. In September 2018, Nike puts up its new “Just Do It” campaign featuring former NFL player Colin Kaepernick who was said to kneel during the national anthem to protest racism, police brutality and social justice. His action turned into a racial and political debate in 2017. The new campaign simply features a close-up of Kaepernick and a quote reads, “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.” Nike has been criticized for long relying on controversies in marketing practices, as they have used controversial celebrities as Tiger Woods and Charles Barkley in previous campaigns as well.

It is dangerous and vicious when marketers try to manipulate human consciousness by fueling controversies. What is even worse is when marketers make use of people’s kindness and good will under disguise of a cause or meaning but in the attempt for marketing goals. Such manipulation, as Postman would agree, occurs when marketers concern less about product but more about people’s feeling, when images and slogans are used as essentials in advertising to affect human decisions, when important narratives and symbols are trivialized, when IMC becomes a pseudo-therapy that aims at providing temporal satisfaction to psychological needs.

Postman understands the vulnerability to manipulation as embedded in human nature. As censorship is a tribute to the assumption that human beings know how to differentiate between serious discourse and entertainment (*Amusing* 141). Manipulation is built on the premise that human liberty is intrinsic. As Herman Parret states, the

discursive, social and artistic productivity of man has no meaning unless it is understood as a web of reasons of reasonable object (17). Calvin L. Troup in the essay “Ordinary People Can Reason: A Rhetorical Case for including Vernacular Voices in Ethical” argues, human liberty is essential in media ecology tradition, which is an abiding commitment to human will as exercised personally and communally in choice, decisions, and creativity concerning the most substantial matters of life (441-453).

Media ecology makes us conscious of our capacities, and it also makes us aware that IMC practices today actually suppress human nature by manipulating our psychology through techniques, such as propaganda or hype. As Wilson Bryan Key in *The Age of Manipulation* expounds, advertising operates from an almost universal simplistic human motive, namely “to sell,” as compared to both fine art and literature, which are created out of motivational complexity - diffuse, contradictory, and paradoxical (xix). The manipulative motives of advertising and public relations produce images for momentary conscious perception, repression, and unconscious memory storage. They are created to be unacknowledged, consciously insignificant audience experiences. (xix). The status quo IMC informs that such “manipulation” has been accepted as natural and normal.

The Internet word “FOMO” – fear of missing out – best describes the mass psychology of why people would accept manipulation. FOMO is an increasingly common condition plaguing a growing population in today’s media environment. As Luna from Huffpost states, psychiatrist believes that FOMO heralds a transformative confluence of technology and social awareness. Because of the many ways we communicate and connect with the world today, they can heighten the insecurities and

jealous emotions in us. FOMO is a psychological condition highlighted in the age of smartphone.

Social Scientific Approach

One of the issues in today's IMC that we might not be aware of is its social scientific orientation, which Postman rejects. As we become more and more engaged in mobile environment, Cheney-Lippold alerts, "we actually live in a world of ubiquitous surveillance" (4). We are constantly and easily observed, recorded and analyzed as data, and we find our identifications as data interpreted by algorithms in a digital media environment (5). As people get more participation in the cyberspace, our identity in this world is more of a declaration by our data as interpreted by technologies (5).

IMC is increasingly concerned about understanding consumers and prospects by collecting and analyzing data. Schultz et al believe that through data, IMC practitioners can identify the best planning for IMC. Moreover, data makes it possible for IMC to be measurable. Anindya Ghose argues in *Tap: Unlocking the Mobile Economy*, mobile technologies especially smartphones make it possible to discover the consumer's habits, so that marketers are able to study consumers on a more personal basis. Ghose contends that the important source about location is what is unique about mobile as a channel in the new media environment. Since the smartphone is portable and personal, data on the device make it accurate and precise to identify a person's location. Human beings are creatures of habits, so data is useful in studying human habits. Through data, IMC practitioners are able to know about their customers, such as where they go, when they

go, how they go, where they stay, how long they stay and in which area they stay and so forth (67).

The dependence on data reflects a social scientific perspective. By collecting and analyzing data, a conclusion can be made based on empirical evidences. Certainly, social scientific approaches provide valuable insights to understand consumer habits and behaviors. Nevertheless, Postman contends that social scientific method is a rediscovery of what have already been discovered or known, which does not provide anything new. Postman also argues that data provides generalization of human performance and create the illusion that human activities can be calculated and measured (*Technopoly* 140). Since computer makes it easy to convert facts into statistics and to translate problems into equations, statistics actually creates a great amount of information, mostly useless information. It generates more than a case of information overload, but information trivia (*Technopoly* 127).

Anti-Communication

The smartphone dis-encourages face-to-face communication by making online shopping favorable. Online shopping has been available for a long time, but it didn't become so popular and dominant in today's marketplace until the smartphone took the control of our communication media. If in the past, people make reference to online products and then make purchases in store; today it's totally reversed. And since online shopping becomes favorable, more and more physical stores face tremendous difficulties in today's marketplace. They either need to put them into the cyberspace, or find other strategies to flight against online shopping.

The traditional face-to-face communication has been significantly diminished in the current IMC practices, when the smartphone provides alternatives to both marketers and consumers. Face-to-face communication is redefined as it is no longer a time and space bounded activity. Through smartphone apps, face-to-face conversation is made possible to occur in virtual environment at different places at different time zones. Real time online chat becomes the new trend for customer service.

Before the smartphone, shopping trips are real trips that we need to be physically present in a store or a marketplace, and be prepared for face-to-face communication. And marketers need to be prepared to provide suggestions or answer questions for real encounters. Nowadays, however, when you go shopping in a store, a sales person will even encourage you to “check out our website or download our app”, as you can find all the products information and promotions there. Researches even indicate that people favor online shopping because they are provided more choices, but on the other hand, what makes them hesitate and worry is the issue of trust (Katawetawaraks and Wang 66-72).

Although the smartphone offers alternatives to face-to-face conversation in the current media environment, there is a growing concern that the art of human communication is diminished nonetheless. The art of face-to-face conversation lies in the attentiveness to others, and that is where trust resides. As Ronald Arnett argues, the courage that extends the reach of dialogue to others provides the foundation for trust (244). However, nowadays we become more timid to others, but more attentive to technologies.

It becomes so common to see that a lot of what used to be done in direct contact or face-to-face environment is now done through technological mediated communication. We used to talk to local people for directions and suggestions when travelling in a foreign country, but now we turn to Google Map and Yelp. We used to know people from meeting up and talking with them, but now we start to know others from a profile picture. The new word “phubbing” – a combination of phone and snub- may best characterize such consciousness, or unconsciousness to be more accurate. People today are so focused on smartphones and ignore the others even they are in the front. Misra et al. conducted a research on iPhone effect and concluded that even just with the presence of the smartphone, the quality of communication is affected (275-298). People who have conversations in the absence of the smartphone show higher levels of empathetic concerns to others.

As a matter of fact, the beginning of the marketplace and commerce started from the face-to-face exchange of goods. Time and space have been important parameters in understanding communication practices. However, the smartphone challenges the traditional practices by supplying virtual environment. John Bignell states that the virtual representations in time and space have been examples of, as well as agents for a postmodern subjectivity (202). What we have lost might be the sense of humanness that’s embedded in the art of face-to-face conversation. When we lose our ability to relate to people and to empathize with people, we become indifferent to others.

Discussion

History might not repeat itself, but it rhymes. History always provides insights and implications to the ongoing preoccupations. Although Postman's critique was made over 30 years ago, what we have learnt from him has the greatest possible relevance to IMC practices today. Postman would not be surprised about what is happening today, as he actually prophesized them coming. He is prescient of foreseeing today's IMC practices because he looks beyond the surface. He understands that our minds, values and cultures are significantly impacted by media and media environment. Media matter more than we are aware of.

The smartphone extends and amplifies the epistemological biases of the computer, while facilitates a new epistemology. It reconfigures IMC in the smartphone-mediated environment by redefining the important components of IMC. IMC, propelled by the smartphone epistemology, celebrates trivia and affluence, and commits itself to the manipulation of mass psychology and anti-communication. Ultimately, IMC in the age of smartphone speaks one persistent voice – the voice of Technopoly.

Technopoly, as Postman defines, is a state of culture as well as a state of mind (*Technopoly* 71). Technopoly is achieved in the deification of technology. When human activities seek authorization and satisfaction in technology, and when technological advancement becomes the synonymous for the progress of human activities, Technopoly is called into existence. Ellul claims that every new technology, while in theory solving an existing problem, creates a series of new problems, and in a technological society we seek to solve the new problems with still more technologies, leading technology to expand at a geometric rate (136). If the computer is considered as the near-perfect

machine for Technopoly, the smartphone is no doubt the perfect machine for Technopoly in today's mediated environment. It vividly exemplifies what Postman describes as "a case of metaphor gone mad" (*Technopoly* 112).

IMC finds itself as an exhibit of Technopoly, because IMC embraces a basic idea of understanding human communication through methods, either through data and statistics, through hype or propaganda. Postman argues legitimate forms of understanding human communication are not through methods, but through telling stories (*Conscientious* 16). Telling stories about the consequence of technology is one of the biggest theoretical contributions of media ecology (*Conscientious* 18).

Postman emphasizes that his perspective of media ecology is both humanistic and moralistic (*Conscious* 18-19). A crucial assumption that grounds Postman's media ecology is his belief in human's free will and choice. The study of media environments is an approach to understanding human conditions. As Strate suggests, the human condition is the context in which human beings find themselves, and conditioned response is a learned reaction to external stimuli (*Amazing* 62). Strate concludes,

We exist within a reciprocal relationship, a dialogue if you like, between the conditioned and the conditions, the internal and the external, the organism and its environment, and also the mind and the body. The changes that we introduce into our environment, that alter the environment, feed back into ourselves as we are influenced, affected, and shaped by our environment. (*Amazing* 63)

To Postman, any practice that suppresses or impairs free will and choice is a violation of human ethics. Lacking a lucid set of ethics, Technopoly is going to search for a source of

authority and find it in the idea of statistical objectivity (*Technopoly* 132). It is dangerous and threatening to human being.

Ironically enough, it is technology that now drives us to reflect on connections between people, between people and environment, and people and technology. The social fabric of our society, the Internet as well as the smartphone are giving us opportunities to communicate on a scale that was unimaginable in the past. The constantly advancing technology is to urge us think about alternatives of how to keep our humanities and humanness and live a better life.

CHAPTER SIX

CONTEMPLATING BETTER IMC

A THERMOSTATIC PERSPECTIVE

In *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, Postman says, “if looking ahead means anything, it must mean finding in our past useful and humane ideas with which to fill the future” (13). Postman is particularly in favor of the ideas from the age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, in which those past ideas advanced our understanding of ourselves and enlarged our definitions of humanness. More importantly, he suggests that those past ideas provide both constructive and practical implications to the future for human societies (*Building* 13-14).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Postman helps us understand how IMC practices have been changed by our immersion in different media environments, and how we have reached the status quo of IMC with the current media environment. By change, Postman is sounding alarms rather than celebrating. Grounded in the tradition of media ecology, which aims to outline the structure of society and culture in a mediated world, Postman is prescient in making the problems of IMC practices explicit as inevitable consequences of our choice of communication media. Information overload and trivialization have become normative in today’s marketplace, which contribute to the increasingly ineffectiveness of IMC. People are accepting the ways in which they are informed and analyzed under the name of “segmentation,” “personalization” or “customization”. Hype, disinformation and manipulation have been accepted as natural and inevitable. Today’s IMC is significantly filled with technic-laden and commercial-

oriented practices. And the problems of status quo IMC rooted in the biases of media are dear to Technopoly.

Perhaps, as Strate states, in the brave new world as ours today, we have our modern day wizards who unleash powerful forces upon our world, through the agency of communication media (*Amazing* 137). What Huxley pictured in *Brave New World*- as human beings adapt themselves to a particular environment, they come to accept the status quo as the only available standard, and may even accept it as the best of all possible worlds- has been vividly demonstrated by current IMC practices (Postman "*Conscientious*" xiv). As technology has more extensive interfere and influence over human activities, how to preserve our humanness in Technopoly is imperative to our survival.

The danger, as Postman puts, lies in the fact that people do not think about it. If we celebrate what technologies do for us, and we ignore what they do to us, we are in the crisis of scarifying our humanity to technology. Thus, what Postman aims is to awaken our responsibilities to question our living environment and also our capabilities to reflect and contemplate improvement in a pragmatic way. This chapter is in an attempt to seek implications from Postman's past ideas concerning technology and humanity, and contribute to inform more ethical and effective IMC practices in the current mediated environment.

Technopoly

Technopoly tells a story of a human society sustained by a blind and unfailing belief in technology. It is called into existence when human activities are judged by

technical standards, and when the progress of human society is taken as same as technological progress. Technopoly makes technological progress synonymous as social progress. It is worth noting that Postman's understanding of social progress is significantly influenced by Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Postman contends, in any field from politics to religion to science, "reason was to be employed as the best means of assisting history's inevitable movement toward progress" (*Building* 29). But the application of reason alone is not sufficient to sustain social progress. "The poetic insights and humane feeling", which provide an ethical basis, aid reason to become the source of social progress (32). Poetically, Postman concludes, "progress is the business of the heart, not the intellect" (32).

Postman points out that Technopoly "casts aside all traditional narratives and symbols that suggest stability and orderliness, and tells, instead, of a life of skills, technical expertise, and the ecstasy of consumption" (*Technopoly* 179). Certainly, skills and technical expertise make significant contributions to social progress. Murray Jardine remarks that successive technological advancement has improved human existence in many ways, such as the increase in life expectancy (17). But technology can be destructive if misused, as Jardine adds, and human beings have frequently had great difficulty using it in a constructive manner (18). Nuclear technology has horrifying power, and genetic engineering have dangerous potentials for dehumanization as well (Jardine 18). Strates also warns us that if there exists an absence of restraint on technology, competition is possible to continue driving invention and innovation, despite

there will be potential for unforeseen and undesirable effects coming along (*Amazing* 141).

Nonetheless, it is not pragmatic and helpful to think that we should just abandon our new media and technologies or deny the legitimate benefits that technological inventions have brought to human being, and go back to old days and retrieve a less advanced way of life. Postman even alleges that anti-technology is stupid, because human beings need technology to live (*Building* 44). The problem is when human beings are assured they can turn to technology for instant solutions, and the answer to any problem that any given innovation introduces is more technology. Human beings have grown accustomed to focusing on what technological innovations are supposed to do for them, but often ignore what they will undo. Moreover, they are always ignorant of what technological innovations do to them.

The Problem of Technopoly

Postman argues that the underlying problem of Technopoly is its lack of a moral center (*Technopoly* 179). The story of Technopoly is a deification of technology. Strate comments that Technopoly is an end in and of itself (*Amazing* 141). Without a moral center, there is no ultimate truth. If there is no ultimate truth, there is no transcendent authority to which we can ask if what we are doing the right thing, or what is the right thing to do. Without a moral basis, lack of limit and boundary are inevitable consequences. Such is the story of Technopoly that emphasizes progress, but progress without limit and boundary, thus consequences without responsibilities. Without a moral context, such as a sense of human ethics and dignity, we find ourselves unable to turn

technology to humane purposes and to make meaningful human lives in an increasingly technology-mediated world. A moral center is vital to human being, because it gives meaning and purpose to our activities, our experience and ultimately our existence. It reminds us of our human conditions as plural and social.

Postman argues that the alternative is to have a naturalistic foundation of morality (*Building 101*). However, as the media have become the major controllers of both production and consumption of narratives today, what are considered as “natural” today is significantly affected by media and our immersion in the media environment. As Fulton et al contend, what we take as most “natural” are those to which the media have accustomed us (1). It has been natural to students who cannot submit their homework because of their computers have problems. It has been natural to employee who did not show up in a company event because he or she does not receive the email. It has been natural to a customer who wants to return a purchase because he or she clicked the wrong button online, not because a wrong choice. And it has been natural to a marketer not responding to a customer service request, because the online process takes up to 10 days.

These “natural” stories are not natural when there is no computer, no network, no email, and no online shopping. In human history, what is the right thing to do as a student, an employee, a customer and a marketer has never been determined or even related to what technologies permit. However, if we constantly find our excuse in technology, not only does it mean technology controls our lives, but we are willing to surrender ourselves to something created. The consequence is we turn to human creations for moral answers. As Postman argues, if we need to find answers of “what is right” from human creations such as legislatures, governments and churches, each of these human

creations have evolved over time so that the answer to “what is right” has changed depending on historical conditions, as well as cultures’ various constructed standards (*Building* 99). Thus, excuses could be justified; error could be forgiven; and truth could be not as important.

If we live in a world as what Huxley pictured, in which people not only accept but also enjoy manipulation, there will be no problems to question Technopoly, or IMC as a part of Technopoly’s repertoire. In other words, if people are not conscious, reflective and critical thinking, the status quo will become “what it should be” with no need to question. However, as Troup argues, ordinary people not only “can” but also “do” reason (441). Media ecology tradition also makes human capabilities of being rational and moral as foundation of its claim, which provides hope for our contemplation for alternatives.

In fact, what Postman criticizes is the uncritical acceptance and unreflective worship of technology. He calls for the awareness that any technological change is a trade-off, and culture always pays a price for it (*Five* 1-2). What we need to do, as Strate argues, is to engage in concerted evaluation of the costs and benefits of technologies, with a mind understanding that innovations will always result in unanticipated and undesirable effects (*Amazing* 138).

Postman’s Response to Technopoly

Not only does Postman enunciate Technopoly as the prominent problem of the current media environment, he also offers constructive advices for individuals and the society to fight against the worst effects of Technopoly. For individuals, the advice is to be a “loving resistance fighter” (*Technopoly* 182). By loving, Postman refers to keeping

the narratives and symbols which once made a culture hope in heart (182). By resistance fighter, Postman refers to

Who pay no attention to a poll unless they know what questions were asked, and why;

who refuse to accept efficiency as the pre-eminent goal of human relations;

who have freed themselves from the belief in the magical powers of numbers, do not regard calculation as an adequate substitute for judgment, or precision as a synonym for truth;

who refuse to allow psychology or any “social science” to pre-empt the language and thought of common sense;

who are, at least, suspicious of the idea of progress, and who do not confuse information with understanding;

who do not regard the aged as irrelevant;

who take seriously the meaning of family loyalty and honor, and who, when they “reach out and touch someone,” expect the person to be in the same room;

who take the great narratives of religion seriously and who do not believe that science is the only system of thought capable of producing truth;

who know the difference between the sacred and the profane, and who do not wink at tradition for modernity’s sake;

who admire technological ingenuity but do not think it represents the highest possible form of human achievement. (183-184)

It is apparent from his non-exhaustive list that a resistance fighter is not a hater. Instead, a resistance fighter approaches and accepts technology with a critical and reflective mind.

He or she is rational and responsible for the choices.

A loving resistance fighter understands that technology has never been neutral, so has the media environment. Human consciousness has been constantly shaped and modified by the biases of media. Nevertheless, he or she has the ability to take control of the media and media effects by being conscious and prudent about psycho-sociological techniques such as polls, numbers, and calculations, which are likely to pre-empt the language and thought. A loving resistance fighter takes seriously about tradition and religion, which prevents him or her being swept away by technological influence. A loving resistance fighter, as Strate understands, embraces “respectful engagement and open dialogue” (*Amazing* 137).

Postman contends that human beings as collectives can reclaim a measure of control over the decadence of our own culture as well. Such control can be achieved through cultural change. Institutions, such as journalism, politics, religion and education, are cornerstones to fight against the onslaught of the current media environment and technological imperatives (Strate 141). And among all institutions, school is the principal instrument to correcting mistakes and addressing problems of a culture. The function of education, Postman says, is always to offer the counterargument (*Teaching* 19). When the environment is innovative, education is to conserve tradition; when the rest of the society focuses on tradition, education is to advocate innovation. As Postman puts forward, “education is best conceived of as a thermostatic activity” (*Teaching* 19).

Postman's Thermostatic Perspective

Postman believes what makes something good or useful relies on the existence of some opposing force that keeps it under control (*Teaching* 18). The stability and vitality of an environment depend on the interplay of the elements in the environment and their diverse and dynamic complementarities (*Teaching* 18). Either intellectual or cultural progress is achieved not only through argument but through the interplay of argument and counterargument (*Teaching* 19). It is the principle of balance that propels changes and progress.

The principle of balance is a founding stone for media ecology that is rooted in the human morality. It predated to Antiquity in Western philosophy. Plato's idea of "proportion" attributes the concept of balance to truth and beauty. Aristotle's "the golden mean" decides between excess and deficiency in human virtue. In the Eastern world, especially in ancient China, Confucius' idea of "Zhongyong" (the doctrine of the mean) and the concept of "Tao" in Laozi illustrate the importance of the principle of balance in how to live a virtuous life. In media ecology tradition, McLuhan calls for a balance between media and human sensorium; Innis looks into how media promote a balance in people's conceptions of time and space. One of the most significant theoretical contributions of media ecology, as Postman defines, is media ecology explains the interactions between media and human beings that give a culture its character and help a culture to maintain symbolic balance (*Humanism* 11). Such perspective puts emphasis on ethics in respect to the disruptive effects of technology, which Postman develops it into a thermostatic perspective.

A thermostatic perspective invites a dialectical and reciprocal investigation of an environment. The mechanism of a thermostat is to trigger opposing forces by making what is too warm cooler and too cool warmer, and keep the environment in a balanced and healthful status (*Teaching* 19). A thermostat not only makes the prevailing bias of an environment visible, but more importantly, it releases countervailing forces to keep an environment in control and equilibrium. A thermostatic activity implies a sense of consciousness as well as a sense of responsibility of the environment.

A loving resistant fighter possesses a thermostatic character. As Postman explains, a loving resistant fighter is conscious of what he or she needs to fight against the worst effect of environment. Thus, narratives and symbols are countervailing forces that provide a sense of coherence and meaning to what he or she cannot get from the environment but essential to a good life. Likewise, institutions, which are able to make contributions to the society, need thermostatic characters as well. Schools function as regulated systems that provide countervailing forces to respond to the prevailing biases in the social environment.

McLuhan addresses a thermostatic perspective in *Understanding Media*, in which he contends that media and technology are as environment, and they become invisible when they become routine and normative. In order to bring them back into human conscious awareness, we need to find anti-environments or counter-environments, whose biases run counter to those of the prevailing environment. McLuhan takes arts as “anti-environments” or “counter-environments” that provide us with the means of perceiving the environment itself (viii). Arts also provide the dialectical counterparts to the technological environments. Art is capable of training people in their abilities of

perception and judgment, so as to understand the ways in which media shape people's thinking processes and worldviews. Ellul takes rhetorical training as a counter-environment to a technological society, as he believes, "a person who has been trained in rhetoric, in the strict sense of the word, can no longer learn in any other way" (216).

For Postman, school functions as the counter-environment to Technopoly. The task of school becomes to make visible the prevailing biases of a culture and offer counterargument to oppose them (20). School stands as one of the several control institutions that serve as a part of a culture's information immune system. Postman points out that school is able to better manage the technological environment by providing an education curriculum, in which

All subjects are presented as a stage in humanity's historical development; in which the philosophies of science, of history, of language, of technology, and of religion are taught; and in which there is a strong emphasis on classical forms of artistic expression. (*Technopoly* 198-199)

Taking as its central concern of "the ascent of humanity", such a curriculum functions as a countervailing force that helps to restore a sense of meaning and purpose back to society in Technopoly. Postman regards the curriculum as "back to the basics," because the response to counterbalance the spirit of Technopoly actually lies in humanity and traditional understanding of education (*Technopoly* 199).

As Postman advocates, it is imperative to "maintain an epistemological and psychic distance from any technology," so that technology can always "appear somewhat strange, never inevitable, never natural" (*Technopoly* 185). The thermostatic perspective enables us to distant ourselves from the main prevailing media environment, so that

objective and critical observation and judgment become possible. As human beings have natural tendencies to adapt ourselves to environment, either natural or media environment, we need to find ways to escape the unhealthy environment. Perhaps only through some distance, are we able to keep our minds lucid and reflective so that we can think critically and live wisely.

Thermostatic IMC

Postman's thermostatic perspective provides a creative yet constructive approach for us to investigate and seek improvement on IMC. Contemplating IMC from his thermostatic perspective is to conceive IMC as a thermostatic activity. The function of a thermostatic IMC is to make the prevailing biases of the media environment visible, and releases countervailing forces as complementarities to address the problems of the media environment. The possibility of attempting alternatives or responses within the realm of IMC is an important implication from the thermostatic perspective, as a thermostat always responds to the environment by adjusting itself.

Considering IMC as a thermostatic activity, this project is going to outline two prevailing biases of the current media environment which IMC makes visible, and proposes two countervailing forces that can contribute to counterbalance the effects of the biases. The countervailing forces are retrieved from Postman's arguments either explicitly or implied. And the possibility of sketching viable IMC practices that can make contributions to the marketplace and society is grounded in understanding the thermostatic IMC as rhetorical and reflective. The aim of the following discussion is to apply Postman's thermostatic perspective as a constructive approach to contemplate

IMC. More importantly, it hopes to initiate new perspectives and approaches to look into IMC.

Prevailing bias No.1: Image and Trivia Dominate the Media Environment

Today's media environment, as characterized by mobile and digital technologies, extends and amplifies the biases of media that favor image and trivia. Popular IMC practices, from advertising, social media influence to celebrity endorsement make the bias of image visible by overstressing how a product looks. However, as Postman indicates, when image displaces words as the primary medium, it redefines our cognitive and thought world, and alters our understanding of information, knowledge, truth, and to a large extent, of reality (*Amusing* 74). An image-based media environment is distance to language, and the consequence is that the Enlightenment sense of reason and rationality are supplanted by modern forms of entertainment as the ground for popular discourse.

IMC makes trivialization visible through what Postman calls "the great symbol drain" (*Technopoly* 164). In fact, as Postman point out, in Technopoly culture like ours, the trivialization of symbols is largely conducted by IMC practices, such as advertising. The extensive abuse of "Keep Calm and Carry On" has vividly exemplified how meaningful symbols can be trivialized to an entertaining slogan. IMC practices manifest such a prevailing worldview that either grows indifferent to tradition or treats tradition as an obstacle. Trivialization is the unavoidable consequence of the current media environment that embraces Technopoly.

Countervailing force No.1: Narrative

To counterbalance the bias of image and trivialization, thermostatic IMC emphasizes narrative as a countervailing force, which is intrinsic in the rhetoric of IMC.

Narrative in Scholarship

Narrative derives from the Latin word *narrare*, meaning, "to tell". In communication scholarship, the term "narrative" has been discussed in various ways. Fulton et al state that narrative is understood as related to the detailed examination of an individual text, which is the focus of literary study, while some others are more concerned with metanarrative- the grand master stories, that are dominant in a culture (15-16). From either standpoint, narrative has been widely understood as "storytelling" in the study of human communication. Strates explains that narrative as storytelling is because it primarily takes a linguistic form (3). As Walter Fisher claims, human beings are by nature storytelling animals. His "narrative paradigm" explains that human beings participate creatively in reading and evaluating the texts of life and literature like authors and co-authors (18). Human beings are participants in the making of messages through communication, whether as agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors) (Fisher 18).

Narrative has been often foregrounded in historical experience of human beings. Liesbeth Korthals Altes suggests from myths to history, and from epics to gossip, stories arguably weave the social fabric and shape what we experience as reality (24). Mairead Nic Craith remarks that stories, whether they are good or bad, are reflections of how people make sense of their experience. Paul Ricoeur's narrative theory is built on the

assertion of an indirection connection between history and narrative, by which historical knowledge proceeds from narrative understanding without losing anything of its scientific ambition (92). The historian's intentionality lies in between the history to narrative (92).

Alasdair MacIntyre argues that each individual is like a character in the narrative, and the existence of others is part of the narratives that help identify who we are. Thus, the story provides a shared narrative for everyone, and calls for obligations for every character (267). As H.L. Goodall, Jr. and Peter M. Kellett contend, "knowing we have 'been there' is a reflective sense-making and narrative skill that enables us to articulate, as much as language allows, the experience of dialogic moments" (166). As James Phelan states, a narrative is not just a story but also action, as it indicates telling of a story by someone to someone on some occasion for some purpose (8).

Strate points out that there is a universal interest to narrative from media ecology scholars, as "the greater emphasis in the field lies with the ways in which narrative changes and evolves in response to changes in media and technology" (*Amazing* 10). Ong notes that narrative as storytelling reflects a strong oral heritage, as narrative is more widely functional in primary oral cultures than in other cultures (140). Narrative illustrates a way of organizing events and thoughts with an order or sequence in a conversation, and oral cultures use stories of human action to store, organize and communicate what they know (Ong 140). Ong argues that narrative in oral cultures serves to bond thought more than in writing or print cultures (141). Strate suggests that the shift from oral to literate media environments results in a shift from our experience of

an event between storyteller and audience in oral culture, to a transaction between objects in literate cultures (19).

Narrative in Postman

Postman affirms such media ecology perspective by demonstrating the shifting patterns and contents of public discourses in different media environments. The change of narrative is closely associated with the change of media. As Fulton et al state, narrative is both historically and culturally positioned in human society (1). In fact, Postman's understanding of narrative has never been personal or individual, but more in a metanarrative way. He enunciates in *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century* that narratives are big stories,

Stories that are sufficiently profound and complex to offer explanations of the origins and future of a people; stories that construct ideals, prescribe rules of conduct, specify sources of authority, and in doing all this, provide a sense of continuity and purpose. (101)

In *Technopoly*, Postman defines narrative as

A story of human history that gives meaning to the past, explains the present, and provides guidance for the future. It is a story whose principles help a culture to organize its institutions, to develop ideas, and to find authority for its actions.

(172)

History, as Postman claims, is the most potent intellectual means of achieving a "raised consciousness" (*Teaching* 137). History clarifies where our ideas and beliefs come from, and also where moral and aesthetic sensibilities come from.

Postman believes that human beings are burdened with a kind of consciousness that keeps us in pursuit of a purpose (*Building* 101). Socrates and Plato advocate that human beings have a purpose in life, that is to seek wisdom. Aristotle argues that happiness is the ultimate good and purpose for human beings. Postman believes that humanity's purpose is "to respect God's creation, to be humble in its awesome presence, and, with honesty toward and compassion for others, to seek ways to find happiness and peace" (*Building* 107). Such purposefulness cannot be fulfilled without a moral context, and a moral context is what Postman regards as "a narrative" (*Building* 101). Thus, the construction and preservation of narratives are major and serious business for human being.

Narrative gets its source from stories of human activities and creativities such as mythology, tradition, ritual, philosophy and art. Postman finds the source of the world's greatest narratives has been religion as found in Genesis or the Bhagavad-Gita or the Koran (*Technopoly* 172). Although Postman was critical of religious zealotry and extremism, he pays respect to the ability of religion that provides narratives that address the question of how we should live our lives (Strate, "Amazing" 19). Tradition is another authoritative source for narratives. Ian Harvey contends that past tradition must be enshrined in ceremonial, present interest evinced in the wearing of a common emblem, and future aspiration declared in the definition of a common creed (196). This is also how human beings display solidarity.

In human history, tradition has been intertwined with the preservation and conservation of knowledge. As Strate points out, there was a natural bias against novelty and innovation before writing because there was lack of means to preserve knowledge

beyond the limits of collective memory (*Amazing 7*). Thus, writing makes it possible to keep the records and calendars so that a steady accumulation of knowledge becomes feasible. Nevertheless, the shift from tradition as an overriding value to a forward-looking belief in progress did not fully take hold until the printing revolution in what we refer to as the modern age (Strate, *Amazing 7*). The consequence is: the image gradually displaces the word as a primary presentation of narrative, while the photograph substituted consumable objects for coherent narrative, and replaced history with nostalgia (Strate, *Amazing 73*).

The change of how narrative is recorded affects how narrative is learned and preserved. It can be imaged that in an oral cultural, narrative is passed down through face-to-face verbal communication, which demands a sense of seriousness and attentiveness. In a typographic culture, narrative is learned through written words, which engages reason and deliberation. However, in a mobile and digital culture like ours, there is no such requirement of either face-to-face verbal communication or typographic minds in passing down narratives. The sense of seriousness and attentiveness in the presence of face-to-face verbal communication has been weakened, while reason and deliberation in words are not required.

It leads to such epistemology as what Postman criticizes that people know a lot of things, but they do not know about them. The danger with such epistemology lies in the tendencies that trivia gets confused with narratives. The media environment facilitates trivia to be pervasive and extensive, therefore seemingly important. The consequence is what is truly important loses their significance, such as narrative. That is what happens when Black Friday shopping and Keeping Up with the Kardashians become world known

American cultures today. And it happens in China, when the younger generations are more enthusiastic about Western holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, but do not treasure Dragon Boat Festival or Double Ninth Festival.

Anti-tradition simply reflects the rejection of narratives. The idea of globalization, for example, has been constantly criticized of working against national tradition, thus against national narratives. Spain, for example, used to be known for its hand-made shoes. But in the recent years, it has been difficult to find hand-made-in-Spain shoes in the country, as most shoes are either imported or mass manufactured. The great narrative of hand-made skills is supplanted by the new narrative of globalization. As far as Postman is concerned, nothing is more disconcerting than a narrative being “mocked, contradicted, refuted, held in contempt, or made to appear trivial” (*Building* 101). He contends that when we need to reread the stories of the past, instead of rejecting them, we ought to revise and expand their meaning to accommodate the new situation, and we ought to read the past with new humility, because we can only make the human story larger by making ourselves smaller (*Building* 114).

Besides narratives, Postman also reminds us that there are also destructive narratives- narratives that do not provide meaning to a culture’s survival in a sustainable way (*Technopoly* 172). A destructive narrative could be fatal to human society such as the story provided by Adolf Hitler to German nation and terrorist attack in recent time. However, compared to destructive narratives, Postman shows more concern about the loss of narratives, because destructive narratives are loud and bold, but loss of narratives is always obscured and neglected.

Postman asserts, we cannot live without narrative, because it is in which we find authority to direct actions, and in which we find principles to organize our institutions. It provides meaning to informs us how we stand as who we are. The ideology of Technopoly by nature works against tradition, because it finds its satisfaction in pursuit of the “new”- the more technological way. Working against tradition inevitably leads to anti-narrative environment. The ultimate consequence of anti-narrative results in the loss of narrative. The loss of narrative, as Postman expounds, is a deprivation of people’s reason for being (*Building* 101). If we have accepted an anti-narrative ideology as normal and natural, it leaves us no basis for the dominion over our used-to-be tools. The loss of narrative is the ultimate negation of life itself, because living without narrative is to live without meaning (*Technopoly* 173).

Narrative-grounded IMC: Restoring Purpose and Seriousness

Narrative is constructed through our lived experience in media environment. What narrative achieves is through symbolic and metaphoric ways to make certain values, truths and beliefs natural and normative. These narratives, as Fulton et al. state, become the stories through which a culture tells an idea of what is natural and normal in its own context (16). Kevin Ryan remarks in *Narrative and the Moral* that one of the essential purposes of narrative is to convey moral understanding (316). Thus, narrative as a countervailing force addresses the problem of lack of moral basis in Technopoly media environment like ours.

Narratives’ intrinsic ethical concerns infuse a sense of purpose to IMC. As Postman states, the purpose of a narrative is to give meaning to the world, and the

measure of narrative's "truth" ought to be found in its humanistic consequence (*Building* 110). As Hackley and Hackley suggest, IMC needs to have a purpose in order to succeed (83). If IMC have been concerned about "what" then followed by "how," narrative makes "why" the prevailing concern.

Narrative as a countervailing force is to call for both mindsets and practices that place purpose before profit in IMC. Simon Mainwaring asserts, "the future of profit is purpose" (53). Mainwaring claims that consumers and corporations have to become partners in the current marketplace "in reengineering the foundational principles of capitalism to honor not only profits but also purpose, mutual self-interest, sustainability, human values, collaboration, and collective prosperity" (4). Mainwaring also emphasizes that marketers should be concerned about what they do every day as a function of how they make their profits, instead of doing something after profits are actually made (4).

It is worthwhile to differentiate the idea of "purpose before profit" from what is regarded as "cause marketing" in today's IMC practices. Cause marketing is the marketing of a for-profit product or business aligning with a cause to produce profitable and societal benefits for both parties. Although cause marketing is supposedly to build on a humanistic purpose as well, the difference is it does not place purpose before profit. Instead, it usually is reversed. Cause marketing still places profit before purpose. The French luxury brand Louis Vuitton claims to donate one hundred US dollars to UNICEF after every purchase of their lock-it bracelet. U.S. shoe brand Toms keeps "One for One" program, in which Toms gives away a pair of shoes for every pair purchased, as their company philosophy. Both brand associate profit with a good cause, but Toms' "one for one" is more powerful to the building of the brand, because Toms makes purpose before

profit. The problem of profit before purpose, which explains the most cases of cause marketing, is that it is easily disguised under the cause but fundamentally functions as a form of hype.

The success of Toms' "One for One" program illustrates the narrative of the brand is what makes the idea of purpose before profit viable. The great story that founded the brand at the beginning, and the brand's consistent effort in preserving the story, make true to the brand's core values. Consumers find more credible and loyal to the brand through their narratives. Supporting causes that are widespread and generic, such as breast cancer awareness, no child left behind, etc., as what many cause marketing campaigns do today may win the battle temporarily at the point of purchase; nevertheless, it will not last long-term if it does not propel sales, and it is arguable if it wins brand love in people's hearts and minds.

Fulton et al. contend that we can describe experience only through language available to us, and we make sense of our new experience based on existing narrative patterns and structure (27). Edward R. Heidt also suggests, the language, the rhetoric, used to explain the non-verbal, social interactions or a moral stance is the key mediating device (6). Postman takes language as "a major factor in producing our perceptions, judgments, knowledge and institutions" (*Building* 70). Language is an invisible technology that embedded in our worldviews and abilities, thus in constructing narratives. Postman expounds, any claim to be considered rational- from commercial to political – must be made in language, and more precisely, in the form of a proposition (*Amusing* 127). A proposition invites response and is open to ethical judgment. And the

sense of seriousness in language makes narrative a countervailing force to fight against the effects of image and trivia centered environment.

IMC practices have shown that language has moved away from the propositional forms. Slogan, for example does not follow propositional form, and can be a form of crazy talk if positioned in the wrong semantic environment (*Crazy* 192). Sloganeering, as Postman argues, is a repudiation of individual thought. The purpose is to go beyond human reasoning and penetrate to emotion (*Crazy* 195). Strate asserts that the fact that we have fiddling as we are amusing, informing, and amazing ourselves to death, we must counter all of our crazy and stupid talk with sane and intelligent dialogue (*Amazing* 145). Only then can we start thinking speaking, and teaching ourselves back to life.

IMC practices, as Postman argues, disdain exposition, for that takes time and invites argument (*Amusing* 131). The best advertising has been the most irrational. The relationship between language and reality is increasingly becoming distant. Consequently, the increasing distrust and skepticism rising from consumers, who become more and more conscious, savvy, critical and reflective in the current media environment. Walter H. Beale claims that human beings are intrinsically creatures of will and choice, and this inescapable fact acts as a kind of centripetal force in discourse, as in all human activities (105). Media ecology also outlines that human beings have both capacity and will to exercise deliberation and live morally, and human society has the need of morality to keep orders and stability.

How to address and preserve narratives are where the power of language is embedded. Thus, narrative-grounded IMC requires what Postman calls “the disciplined use of language” (*Technopoly* 194). By “disciplined,” Postman refers to the significance

of the relationship between language to reality. The concern about language to thought and reality, as well as the idea that language is capable of expressing truth, are inherited from Enlightenment thoughts. Thus, the disciplined use of language is a “back to basics” call to IMC. It requires marketers to make their arguments based on understanding consumers’ capabilities of reason and deliberation. IMC should go back to appealing to human understanding rather than coercions of human volition.

To conclude, narrative is a call to go “back to the basics” in IMC. It reminds us to go back to where it all started with purpose and seriousness. It informs that the purpose of fashion has always been to create beauty; therefore luxury is to be present in the moment of joy not to achieve more “likes”. It informs that the purpose of design has always been to improve human lives; therefore innovation should be present in how a product works rather than how it looks. It informs that the purpose of IMC has always been to facilitate communication; therefore the art of persuasion is to be found in rhetoric not in data or hype.

Prevailing bias No. 2: Computers Work Better Than Humans

Our current media environment also extends and amplifies the biases of computer technologies. As Postman states, the central thesis of computer technology is to make people accustomed to the idea that computers think and work better than humans can. The enthusiasm of information and data showcases how computer ideology makes humans as information processors. Nevertheless, Postman alleges, it will be noticed that the massive collection and speed-of-light retrieval of data have solved very little of

importance to most people and have created at least as many problems for them as they may have solved (*Amusing* 161).

IMC makes this prevailing bias explicit through its unfailing belief in information, data and social scientific approaches. The effectiveness of IMC is determined by how well it manipulates consumers' psychologies through information, data and techniques. The problem of such IMC is it does not take humans as serious participants. By serious, it means IMC practices do not engage people as conscious, rational and reflective. Roger Crisp asserts that advertising aiming for persuasion is morally wrong, if they override the autonomy of consumers such as alcohol and tobacco ads (413-418). Troup also notes that one of the problems of modern public relations practices is that they only seek emotional response but do not invite thought from the public (441). Restoring the understanding of rationality and reason as the bases for human activities is the "go back to basics" curriculum for IMC.

The turn to modern advertising, as Postman remarks, began with the shift of attention from product to consumer. The business expenditures spent on product research are displaced by market research. Marketers started to care more about the character of the consumers rather than the character of products. A once product-driven marketplace has transited to a consumer-driven marketplace. Mayhew contends that once market research becomes the aim for marketers, and the means by which marketers demonstrate the value of their services, "rational" advertising will turn into planned advertising (196). The issue about planned advertising is it must start with a central concern and analysis of consumers (Mayhew 196).

Indeed, the modern mode of advertising represents a significant epistemological turn in the marketplace and a common agreement on the status quo IMC, because the understanding of marketing communication as appealing to human emotion more than reason has ever since become normative. It is unstated but implied in Postman's critique that modern advertising has been too much about pathos. And the use of pathos has been the primary strategy that characterizes today's IMC practices. However, it is important to note that Postman is not against the idea of the emphasis on consumers per se. Instead, what he criticizes is in fact two folded: on the one hand, he points out that the increasing emphasis on the consumers is primarily through appealing to human emotion not human rationality, which inevitably leads to the ignorance of human autonomy and manipulation of human consciousness. On the other hand, the increasing emphasis on consumers nevertheless leads to the turn away from the emphasis on products.

Countervailing Force No. 2: Ethos

To counterbalance the prevailing bias of the computer, a thermostatic IMC emphasizes ethos as a countervailing force. Ethos provides a new standpoint to view the effectiveness of IMC that is different from pathos. Moreover, an ethos-based IMC recalls our capabilities and responsibilities that are suppressed by the bias of media, and retrieves those significant "ought" back to IMC practices.

Concepts of Ethos

As a term of rhetoric, ethos derives from Aristotle, who was first to theorize it in his rhetorical triangle. Aristotle introduced the idea of ethos, pathos and logos as the three

modes of persuasion (*pisteis*). Ethos achieves persuasion by establishing the speaker's credibility and authority. Pathos persuades the audiences by appealing to their emotions. Logos is the use of logic and reason for persuasion. All three means – ethos, pathos and logos- buttress each other and cooperate to warrant the reliability and authority of the speaker, and hence the credibility of discourse. And the concepts expressed in the terms of ethos, pathos and logos provide the rhetorical building blocks for an effective argument. These three concepts have ever since been largely discussed and applied in human communication, including IMC.

As George Kennedy interprets, ethos in Aristotle is commonly understood as “character”, especially “moral character” (37). Ethos is more than merely a character, but is action-oriented, as Aristotle considers ethos occurring in the moment of speech. Thus, ethos in communication and rhetoric has a functional characteristic, as it assumes the action has already taken place, and shown in performance. Altes contends, ethos allows the speaker's argument to carry weight with the audience (Altes 2). The purpose of ethos is to make the speaker worthy of credence and the speech trustworthy

Ethos for Isocrates is both a legitimating source for and a praiseworthy effect of the ethical practice of the speaker's art (Hyde xv). The speaker's character anchors the persuasive capacity of rhetoric, while education and socialization contribute to the character development. “The power of speak well” is credited as being “the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul” (Antidosis 255). Aristotle, on the other hand, as Hyde suggests, associates ethos not primarily with the speaker's reputation but rather with the actual rhetorical competence displayed in the discourse (xv). Aristotle directs our

attention away from an understanding of ethos as a person's well-lived experience but toward an understanding of ethos as an artistic accomplishment (Hyde xv).

Cicero's idea of prior ethos contributes to the speaker's trustworthiness is especially relevant to today's media environment. Prior ethos indicates that the audience has already had an image of the speaker on the basis of his reputation, previous action, or generally known character traits. It has never been easier for the audiences – the consumers- to retrieve the past deeds of a brand or a marketer through various media and social networks in today's media environment. Thus, it is especially important to have an emphasis on ethos in understanding and practicing IMC.

Hyde argues that besides moral character and performance skills, ethos also brings out a speaker's a sense of communal existence (xvii). Hyde contends that realizing audience has its own ethos is what the speaker's ethos attends to. Ethos as a component of rhetorical argument is dependent on the speaker's ability to put his audiences into the right frame of mind so that the audiences' emotional states during the oration and subsequent deliberations are advantageous to the speaker's persuasive intent. It is worthy noting that there is an embedded sense of attentiveness in ethos that makes the speaker aware of the existence of otherness, thus of the communal existence.

Ethos assures that moral character and trustworthiness are central to the understanding of IMC's effectiveness. Moreover, Altes argues that whether a story to be taken seriously is based on ethos (128). And whether the audience would trust or distrust the speaker's authenticity, and how they would take the speaker's sincerity is where human intelligence is applied (Altes 128). Ethos acts as a vehicle for audience's empathic involvement in narratives. An emphasis on ethos not only provides countervailing force

to the excess of pathos, but also offers valuable insights in guiding IMC practices with its intrinsic rhetorical implications.

Ethos as a Countervailing Force

Troup argues that the status quo IMC is a conduit of some of the most sophisticated methods and techniques available (10). The current digital and mobile media environment makes propaganda and hype natural and common in IMC practices. Psycho-social techniques such as polls and rankings become what Strate calls “the triumph of technological imperative” (*Amazing* 111). The techniques of segmentation and customization permeate IMC practices as ways of engaging individual consumers as data. The move to greater customer engagement, as Troup suggests, actually reflects a growing sophistication and individualization of psycho-social techniques (10). The application and sophistication of psycho-social techniques in IMC is an affirmation of Technopoly.

Michael Philips states, manipulative advertising violates personal autonomy, and undermines traditional virtues and prevents people from living the best life of which they are capable, as it is simply unethical to manipulate or use another person for one’s own purposes (77). While manipulative techniques still work in the status quo IMC, however, under the current media environment, when information has been degraded and trivialized, the increasing distrust and lack of loyalty permeate the status quo IMC. As Craith contends, the biggest concern that consumers have today is how can they be sure that the marketers are telling the truth (26). Since manipulation is easily conducted today, it has been too easy for marketers to get stuck on creating the impressive logo and the

perfect slogan, while they are likely to forget what makes them truly trustworthy (Craith 26).

Indeed, the idea of alternative IMC practices, as Troup argues finds its source and ground in rhetoric and philosophy of human communication (10). Trustworthiness is central to Aristotle's rhetoric. For Aristotle, it is in the effect of trustworthiness or reliability that he grounds the effectiveness of discourses and persuasion. Gloria M. Boone and Edward J. Harris state that the basis for the discipline of communication is the analysis and criticism of rhetoric (127). Perhaps, as Harvey suggests, persuasion is the organic stream that vitalizes a free society, which is the only effective alternative to the machinery of force (X).

Grounded in the rhetorical perspective, Mayhew offers a notion of rhetorical token that respond to the issue of credibility (185). A rhetorical token, as Mayhew discusses, works in public discourse to express value and meanings that cannot be reduced to simple propositions (13). To redeem a rhetorical claim is to respond with "clarification, specification, and evidence to the satisfaction of an audience that shares many of the speaker's values and presuppositions and relies on these common meanings to fill in the blank" (13). As Troup understands, when a rhetorical token is used faithfully in an argument, substantial and truthful support not only exists, but also could satisfy scrutiny into legitimacy when it is requested to be redeemed (16).

Mayhew conceives rhetoric as relying on trust (14). Because of the bounded rationality, people would accept rhetorical tokens, but their trust is not limitless. To protect the viability of the civic discourse – such as IMC- relies on the characters of leaders to make good on their claims and promises (Mayhew 14). Mayhew believes that a

rhetorical token will not be effective without a faithful character of the product as well as the marketer. Ethos as a countervailing force that emphasizes characters addresses the bias of computer media environment.

Ethos-based IMC: Restoring Trustworthiness

If ethos itself sounds metaphysical, the three components that ethos comprises according to Aristotle's Rhetoric, namely practical wisdom, virtue and good will, might shed some lights on guiding how ethos-based IMC would look like.

The first component of ethos is known as practical wisdom (*phronesis*). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes practical wisdom as a characteristic that is "bound up with action, accompanied by reason, and concerned with things good and bad for a human being" (1105a). Aristotle's practical wisdom is different from what Plato calls *sophia*, which is theoretical knowledge and abstract wisdom. Practical wisdom refers to the actual capacity for discerning in the sphere of action the intermediate point where right conduct lies in any given situation (Hyde 10-11). It is concerned about the particular and practical, and is a virtuous act that reflects deliberate choice (Hyde 11). Thus, practical wisdom is essential in human beings' making virtuous choices.

Another important aspect of practical wisdom is it includes the idea of knowledge and expertise through experience. As Hyde argues, practical wisdom indicates that a good speaker should know a great deal to be successful (10). A speaker with practical wisdom is someone who, as Postman would say, not only "knows" but also "knows about" a lot. Practical wisdom is what has been missing since the television-based media environment.

Postman's understanding of wisdom is an inheritance of Aristotle's practical wisdom. Postman contends, knowledge is the organization of information, and wisdom is the capacity to know what body of knowledge is relevant to the solution of significant problems (*Building* 95). Postman's wisdom is also practical and is action-oriented. He points out that the biggest problem of the twenty-first century is how to transform information into knowledge, and transform knowledge into wisdom (98). In fact, transforming information into knowledge is intrinsic in IMC, because of its function of integration of media and messages. Nevertheless, it has never been the concern of IMC to provide "what we need to know in order to think" (96). IMC has never been concerned about offering wisdom. Ethos makes "what we ought to know in order to think" as intrinsic in the function of IMC.

To display practical wisdom, IMC ought to go back to basic capacity, which means to go back to the core of business, of marketplace, of marketing, namely the product. There is nothing more persuasive than the actual value of product and the originality of craftsmanship. Joe Pulizzi proposes in the Content Inc. model, there is a center point for brands to identify themselves, through a sweet spot, which lies in the intersection of knowledge or skill area and a passion point (31). Troup also argues that the demands for eloquence in IMC are grounded in wisdom, not in hyper-mediated world of practices (17). If Apple's IMC practices have been understood as driving hype, it is worthy noting that what makes today's Apple company is its narrative with regard to revolutionary design and manufacturing. Practical wisdom simply shifts our attention to be back to product and craftsmanship as the basics of IMC.

The second component of ethos is virtue (*arête*). There are two sorts of virtues in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, virtue of thought and virtue of character (1103a15). Virtue of thought arises mostly from teaching; virtue in ethos is the virtue of character. Virtue is commonly understood as honesty and sincerity in the character of the speaker. Aristotle argues that virtue of character is not a natural human capacity like human senses, but something humans acquire through habits (1103b). Since the repetition of similar activities results in different habit, therefore, we must perform the right activities. Aristotle also contends that every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well (1106a16). Like the virtue of eyes makes the eyes function well so that humans can see clearly. Thus, virtue is functional as it is embedded in the performance. Hyde explains that virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, and the proper choice contains moral and/or intellectual virtue that will lead to happiness (7).

To display virtue, ethos-based IMC should always tell the truth. Aristotle believes that telling the truth is central to ethos, because when a speaker lacks ethos, he or she may not tell the truth. Telling the truth is a basic curriculum to give IMC a virtuous character. IMC cannot function well if it does not aim for providing truth. The opposites are to lie or confuse or simply close argument, which has been extensive in today's IMC practices.

The U.S. clothing company Everlane sets a great example for displaying virtue. On Everlane's website, each product is presented with three prices: Everlane's retail price, the common market price and a detailed breakdown of costs, including material cost, hardware cost, labor cost, to logistics cost and duty fees. Everlane's pricing system provides a virtuous practice that enables consumers to make rational choices based on

knowledge of the information. Of course, the assumption that the costs the company provides are true and accurate. Nonetheless, Everlane's approach on pricing sets an example of a virtuous character that telling the truth with relevant information, and encourages consumers to make choices based on rational and critical thinking.

Second, the basic of virtue of character is in the essence of a mean (Aristotle 1109a20). Ethos-based IMC should avoid excess or deficiency as a basic ethical concern. Aristotle understands that it is hard to find the intermediate; thus it is hard work to be excellent (1109a25). To display virtue of a mean is to encourage IMC to do the right thing to the right person in the right way at the right time.

Aristotle asserts that even though speakers have practical wisdom and virtues, if they lack of good will they might withhold the best advice (Hyde 11). Good will (*eunoia*) comprises the last part of ethos. Good will refers to the speaker's good intentions to the audience. Wisse argues that good will perfectly reflects the Greek concepts of goods, because the common opinion in Greek philosophy was that one should do good to friends, but harm to enemies (30).

To display good will, as Altes remarks, the speaker needs to know the audiences and to have an estimate in mind about what kind of style and argument best appeal to the specific audience (4). H.L. Goodall, Jr. and Peter M. Kellett argue, in the field of communication, creating the right mood, through the spirit that we bring to communication, increases the chances of bringing out the appropriate form of energy that brings us together with others (165). And such spirit is grounded in a humanistic ethos of communication, which creates the possibility for dialogue to emerge (Goodall and Kellett

165). Thus, the intrinsic sense of communal existence actually propels an ethos-based IMC to be attentiveness and responsive.

Good will enables IMC to take causes seriously before taking actions. However, it is not only a hollow claim, but is action-oriented. The shoe company Toms sets a great example for displaying good will. Toms started the business with a “one for one” cause to help child who grow up in need of shoes. The simple idea of helping children has evolved into a powerful business model that helps address need and advance health, education and economic opportunity for children and their communities around the world. The clothing company Everlane also showcases another example of putting good will into action. The clothing company is using recycled plastic bottles to turn into fibers of their clothing. A Sherpa fleece is made by 35 plastic bottles, and 60 plastic bottles are renewed into a puffer.

Ethos-based IMC can be found in what Jay Baer calls “Youtility” (30). Baer argues that there are two ways companies can differentiate themselves and derive meaningful business results: one is to be disproportionately amazing, which can work, but extraordinarily difficult. The other way is through “Youtility,” namely to be useful (30). Youtility features at least one of these three approaches: first is self-serving information which give people the opportunity to inform themselves how and when they wish, instead of giving them information directly (44). The second is through radical transparency, which means providing answers to every question a customer could conceivably ask, even before they think to ask (44). The third is real-time relevancy, which means to become useful at particular moments for customers and then fading into the background until when opportunity to help arises (45). Baer contends that the value of

a company is in its ability to help not sell, and the value of marketing is not in hype but in Youtility that helps customers and prospects make better decisions, as he claims: “If you sell something, you make a customer today. If you help someone, you may create a customer for life” (3).

Ethos-based IMC can also be found in what Mainwaring’s “We First” value of accountability. Accountability is what builds trust between institutions and the public and between brands and their consumers (82). Mainwaring contends, in a connected and globalized marketplace, trust has become the only social currency for business (83). The accountable way to earn trust is to be honest and forthright (83). Accountability also indicates transparency, which requires individuals and companies operate with honesty, credibility, and congruency between their words and deeds (83).

Don Schultz, Stanley Tannenbaum and Robert Lauterborn set the tone for the effectiveness of today’s IMC. They believe that the real differentiating feature that a marketer can bring to the marketplace is what consumers believe about the company, product, or service and their relationship with the brand in modern marketplace (45). Thus, where IMC’s value resides is in the minds of customers has been a widely accepted value in the realm of IMC. As digital and mobile media environment gives consumers more power in dealing the relationships with marketers, consumers have freed from the lockstep of uniform opinion, and have developed their own tastes and found new power as manufacturers scurry to respond (Schultz et al. 11).

However, ethos-based IMC encourages a “we relationship” instead of unreflectively praising customer-centric approach. Customer-centric approach, to some extent, manifests what Martin Buber phrases as I-It relationship. The idea of “center” in

IMC does not contribute to an organic thinking of IMC. The customer-centric approach gives IMC a seemingly dialogic sense. However, the problems of IMC and its Technopoly effect showcase that there is no genuine dialogue in IMC yet, because there is no whole being of the both parties. The whole being cannot be achieved with manipulation of human autonomy and liberty, and coercion of rationality and deliberation.

However, “we” is an idea that comes back to the tradition and basics of human conditions. Fundamentally, products are the driving forces for marketplace and the reason for marketing communication. Traditionally, what a marketer should focus on is how to make valuable products to assist human survival. Thus, “we relationship” infuses the virtue of mean into contemplating IMC. It is rooted in the belief that we should act toward others in the same way that we want to be treated. It emanates from our natural inclination to be social animals, to share our lives with other people and to build communities together. The understanding of “we” is thus profoundly humane and ethical.

“We relationship” in ethos-based IMC focuses on the product and craftsmanship while take consumer’s opinion into account. The balance is what it pursues. Realizing consumers’ mindset and satisfaction can be changed by environment, the emphasis on product and craftsmanship nevertheless should be nonnegotiable. The attention and efforts on product and craftsmanship should not be sacrificed in any circumstance. And “we relationship” in IMC is not possible if the timeless wisdom of ethos is ignored.

To Aristotle, ethos is almost the controlling factor in persuasion (Kennedy 38). Being strong in ethos is a pinning point for persuasion. Ethos, focused on the moral character of the speaker, makes the “ought” explicit and prominent, and brings “ought”

back to the consideration of communicative practices. Putting “ought” back to IMC leads to value judgment into IMC practices. Ethos-based IMC is to bring the intrinsic ethical concern that has been missing in Technopoly back to the marketplace. Although the spirit of Technopoly is pervasive and extensive, ethos-based IMC is still viable because it does not need external forces to make the change happen. Like a thermostat, it responds from inside-out. All it requires is a sense of reflection and deliberation.

Discussion

As Strate comments, media ecology is Postman’s best alternative for finding an overarching narrative improve on the human condition without sacrificing the very things that make us human (*Amazing* 144). A thermostatic perspective gives a constructive standpoint to contemplate IMC in the changing mediated environment. It offers a fresh approach to consider the interplay between technology and humanity in the marketplace.

Narrative-grounded and Ethos-based IMC shows their roots not only in media ecology, but also in the philosophy and rhetoric of human communication. Human beings are brought up with stories. Narrative helps us make sense of our lived experience, our current realities, and helps build a comprehensible and predictable sense of continuity on our experiences and practices for the future, which provides meaning to our beings (Strate, *Amazing* 8). Ethos gives us an opportunity to awaken our intrinsic capabilities and to restore “ought” to practices.

Narrative and ethos are not just separate rhetorical concepts, but are closely connected in the communication and rhetorical studies as well. Altes states that the speaker’s ability to anticipate how audience may construct his image and intentions in

response to specific clues, and given their own character and norms, shows that the recursive intention and character attributions analyzed among narrative scholars (4). Signaling, deciphering and classifying speakers regarding their authority, reliability, and expertise have been the core business of storytelling since humankind's origin (Altes 7).

Narrative-grounded and Ethos-based IMC together works as a control mechanism goes counter to the prevailing biases of the current media environment. IMC would be more effective when it leads to ethical and humanistic consequences, rather than technical or commercial ends. As Postman argues, when we add control mechanisms into social environments, and if the mechanisms are themselves technical, it makes us into a Technopoly loop, in which it increase the supply of information, and information becomes uncontrollable. The consequence is a breakdown in psychic tranquility and social purpose will occur; and “people have no way of finding meaning in their experiences, lose their capacity to remember, and have difficulty imaging reasonable futures” (*Technopoly* 72).

The thermostatic IMC is a call for reflection not only for marketers but also for consumers. It is important to keep independent thinking and ethical concerns alive, especially in today's media environment when we are surrounded by information chaos and are easily distracted by trivia. If you are going to make a purchases, buy something that you truly love not because of hype, or something that you really need so that there create no wastes; pay fair prices for products that are made out of ethics and value; support brands that play a true role in creating values for human generations. After all, the function of a thermostatic IMC is to provide help based on the purpose. It reminds marketers to establish trustworthy relationships with consumers, while benefits the

marketplace and society. On the other hand, it also propels the individuals as consumers to think how they should live as conscious and responsible participants in the media environment.

Postman's concern has always been about how we human beings can understand ourselves, enlarge our humanities and humanness, and live our best lives in technological environments. It is worthwhile to remember that contemplating IMC should always be grounded in the rhetoric of communication, as it is ultimately human communication in the marketplace. And the rhetoric of communication reminds IMC practitioners to be attentive to the "basic" and "ought". It is those "basic" and "ought" that drive the effectiveness of IMC and contribute to the well being of human societies.

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