

Individuated Media in the Informational Era

Abstract

As the Industrial Era wanes and the Informational Era dawns, transforming the media environment, a new genus of media has arisen as a result of the unprecedented capabilities of computer-mediated technologies to provide simultaneously to massive numbers of consumers an individualized selection of news stories, entertainments, and other informational items for each consumer according to that consumer's own unique mix of needs, interests, tastes, and beliefs. Examples of such new media include Facebook, Google, Renren, Baidu, Twitter, Pandora, Netflix, V Kontakte, Xiami, and Flipboard. These Informational Era products and services, a genus of media which this paper terms Individuated Media, have reached equal or exceeding those of Industrial Era legacy Mass Media products and services, yet each of their consumers simultaneously receives a uniquely different mix of contents than does every other. This individuation of contents packaging is characteristically distinct from Mass Media products and services in which all consumers of a product or a service simultaneously receive the same selections of contents (i.e., edition or scheduled program). Other distinctive characteristics of this new genus of media are that their selection and distribution of contents is entirely dependent upon the algorithmic programming of computer-mediated technologies and that those selections are based not only upon recipients' aggregate demographics (gender, age, geographic location) as with Mass Media, but also upon each individual's behavioral vectors, such as his history of contents consumption, advertisement viewing, keywords searches, product purchases online, overt 'Like's, network of friends, etc. Among the many strategic challenges of Individuated Media for media executives, media academicians, and others whose expertise has chiefly, if not solely, been with Mass Media, are that some theories, doctrines, practices, and business models of Mass Media fail or simply don't exist in Individuated Media. For instance, creating a 'common agenda' can be difficult when each consumer receives a different mix of contents than does every other. Additionally, few Mass Media companies or even media consortia possess the wealth of diverse contents necessary to produce their own Individuated Media products or services, which is why virtually all Individuated Media companies are aggregators. The rise of Individuated Media creates existential challenges for Mass Media companies which wish to preserve their traditional media production and business models. Recent surveys indicate that Individuated Media products and services have already become the predominant means by which most consumers under age 40 in developed countries obtain news, entertainment, and other information. This paper considers recognizing Individuated Media products and services as a distinctly new genus of media and begins to examine their affects upon the theories, doctrines, practices, and business models of media. The strategic challenges of how to develop these new media further, as well as how to integrate legacy Mass Media industries remuneratively into the Individuated Media ecology, open unparalleled and overdue opportunities for media academicians and media executives during the 21st Century.

Keywords: industrial era, mass media, informational era, individuated media, algorithmic media.