

1.16 Characteristics of an Audio-Visual Culture

Aim

- To grasp the characteristics of the contemporary culture of communication.

Procedure

1. MIME

- Make four groups. Each group is given a paper on which some instructions and anecdote is written. They have to read the instruction carefully and present the information to others in the way suggested in the instruction. The others try to guess what information the acting group is trying to give. Give ten minutes to discuss and five minutes slot for each group for presentation.
- Note: The instructor has to make sure that the groups follow the instructions carefully.

Group no. 1

Instruction: You are a group of primitive cave people. You communicate through sounds and actions. Communicate the following message to the other groups using actions and incomprehensible primitive sounds only. The effectiveness of your communication will be seen if the others guess what your message is.

Message: We, the Kikuyu people, normally engage in medium scale farming. We get our everyday meals from our gardens. We also keep livestock for sale and for our own consumption

Group no. 2

Instruction: You are a group of highly evolved cave people. You can write using only symbols, not alphabets of any language. You have to communicate the following message to the other groups using written symbols only. The effectiveness of your communication will be seen if the others guess your message.

Message: We, cave people, went for hunting yesterday. We saw three lions. One of them attacked us. All of us surrounded it. Soon its body was covered with twenty spears.

Group no. 3

Instruction: You are a group of people living in the 15th Century. You can write English. Communicate to the other groups what you see in the picture given to you by writing not more than 5 English words on the board. Just like the other groups, the effectiveness of your communication will be seen if the others guess what is in the photo.

*Give any photo/picture or postcard to the group.

Group no. 4

Instruction: You are a group of people living in the 21st century. You have the possibility of using sound, action, written words, TV, radio and computer amongst others to present your message. You have to communicate the following maxim to the other groups without stating it explicitly anywhere in your presentation. You can use any imaginative modern means of electronic communication. Effectivity of your communication will be seen if the others guess the maxim.

Message: We, the Maasai people engage in livestock rearing as our source of livelihood. We are also very traditional and most of us wear our traditional regalia. Our greatest enemies are cattle rustlers from across the Kenyan border.

2. Discussion and General Sharing

After the presentations let the groups fill the following worksheet:

- What medium of communication did the groups use to present its message?
1st Group:
2nd Group:
3rd Group:
4th Group:
- 'What you see now was not present, just a few years ago' is a fact.

Materials Required

- Instruction sheets for miming, chalk, blackboard, picture postcard, and worksheet.



What are the changes that have taken place in your lifetime in the following aspects:

Satellite invasion	Social Development
Governments	Fashion
Newspapers	Educational Courses
Magazines	Technology
Advertising	Others...

Input

- Social interaction and relations are no longer dependent on simultaneous spatial co-presence. Instantaneous communication through a variety of media fosters intense relations between ‘absent others’. As this happens, our experience of time and space become ‘distantiated’. We experience distant events unfolding instantaneously on a screen in our homes. This speeding up, or growing intensity of time-space compression has profound effects on social, economic and cultural processes. We have become used to a constantly accelerating pace of change and yet the dynamics of globalization are dialectical and unevenly experienced across time and space.
- It took humanity more than 2 million years to invent wheels but only 5000 years more to drive those wheels with the steam engine. The first computers filled entire rooms, and it took 35 years to make the machines fit the desk- but the leap from desktop to laptop took less than a decade. Change is coming so fast that some of the most important technologies of the 21st century may now be just a sketch on a drawing board or glimmer in the mind of a genius
- Technology does not change alone. As mentioned earlier, it has profound effects on cultural practices.

The Audio Visual Age (AV):

- Technology or more specifically, the audiovisual medium of communication is the key to interpreting our contemporary culture. Some of the characteristics of audio-visual age are as follows:
 1. It is an age in which it is not the explicit messages or the rationalistic arguments that are important in communication but the background. It is not the person in the photo that will make it impressive but the quality of the paper on which it is printed, the layout of the article which features it and the publishers who publish it which will empower your message or make you stand out.
 2. It is an age in which the electronic media does not dictate its values/world-view on you. It merely shapes the environment around you to which you eventually conform - because as the systems law says: If you do not allow yourself to become part of the system, you are thrown to the margins of today’s life.
 - Today, firstly, a child interacts with persons - parents, siblings, and classmates. Second, the child interacts with the environment - cradle, house, nature. Third, the child interacts with stories told to it, pictures shown on TV, advertisements, phones and computers.
 - These mediated experiences influence the child’s developing sense of personal identity by directly influencing it and indirectly influencing the people with whom it interacts. The mediated culture becomes the individual’s psychic and social context from birth to death.
 3. It is an age of information: an age in which giving existing information a “new form” is more important than creating individual pieces of information or disseminating information from one to another.
 - The computer is an excellent example of a new society with a central preoccupation for giving existing information a new form. More importantly, it instantaneously presents data in ways that make them easily used, harmoniously arranged and pleasing to look at. In the process, we gain a deep sense of harmony and efficiency.
 4. Conclusion: Into such a society - where background strengthens explicit message and where affectivity is more sought after than effectivity - the Salesian Charism needs to be incarnated. Formerly, when one spoke of being incarnated, one referred to a culture. Today, the AV culture of communication cannot be ignored because it is shaping a new type of person and creating a world where national boundaries are disappearing. “Our Charism must therefore remain open and adaptable to the signs of the times and to cultural values”.

Results of the Development of Communication Technology

1. Miniaturisation of media gadgets.
2. The computer revolution has had a decisive impact in media gadgets, e.g. desk top publishing, community radio, equipment, portable VCR’s, etc.
3. This development has made communication technology more accessible. The situation in Africa seems to show that we are now in position to take full advantage of the situation.
4. The result of development in communication technology is a transformation of the media scene. Over a decade ago, people started talking of what they call the ‘electronic newspaper’ and even predicted the disappearance of the newspaper as we know it. Information became more abundant and more specialised and it was packaged in a variety of ways. Specialised information such as commodity prices, market reports, currency rates, news agency copies, sport results, etc. could be obtained from the television screens operated by various cable services.
5. Since the midst of the 60’s the growth of planetary satellite communication has been spectacular and has become an integral part of many circuits, carrying all types of information related to news agencies, radio and television, navigation, meteorology, mining, aviation, entertainment, etc.

Review

1. The most credible acceleration of all is the pace of technological change.
2. Technology does not change alone. Inevitably, culture also changes with it.
3. The audio-visual medium of communication is the key to interpreting our contemporary culture.

Reflection

In your world, how do you rate a super star? Is it by the magazines in which he/she is featured or the TV programmes they talk in? From now on, withhold your judgement about a celebrity until you have enough information to help you rate them as super star or not.

Relevant Skills

1. Identify how the internet impacts the present culture and especially the youth.
2. Do a survey on how mass communication (books, TV, radio, internet etc) has affected your culture.

Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini, 2000.

References

AMECEA and IMBISA. Communication in the Church and in Society. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000.

