Facing Off: Theorizing Over-Sharing and Under-Reading

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Abstract:

This article offers a distinct rendering of Facebook. The social media giant is framed by Harold Innis's late masterwork, *The Bias of Communication*. Probing what happens with media for leisure transform into educational media, this article explores how the speed and muddled intimacy of Facebook provide distinct challenges for the development of information literacy and information management in higher education.

Keywords: Facebook, Bias of Communication, Harold Innis, space, time, speed, displacement culture

> In my teaching I never concealed my political views: my detestation of war and militarism, my anger at radical inequality, my belief in a democratic socialism and in a rational and just distribution of the world's wealth ... I would scrupulously uphold their right to disagree with me (2005, p. 89) Howard Zinn.

The popularity of Facebook means that an oversharing culture has marinated higher education. Indeed, an upper undergraduate student offering advice to her peers in first year stated that the one piece of information she wished someone had told her was to delete her Facebook account (Murdoch University, 2012). For those who do not follow such advice, the behaviours, language and practices of social networking blur into formal education. We now receive very upsetting and disturbing emails from students who endlessly threaten to leave the institution or 'overshare' with staff, when they should spend some quiet time thinking through the decisions they are making in their lives.[1] The year 2010 was the crucial moment in the history of this oversharing culture. In the April of that year, and for the first time, Facebook received more independent visitors than Google. Google deskilled information literacy. Facebook deskilled interpersonal relationships.

The odd year matters for other reasons, particularly in retrospect. *Time Magazine*'s person of the year is always an intriguing if confrontational decision. Most years, different versions of our collective histories and identities are offered, represented by one person. It is often an unsatisfying selection. The choice for 2010 was no exception. There were two men who each captured a particular refrain and rhythm of that time. Mark Zuckerberg became the 2010 Time Person of the Year, capturing the rise and rise of Facebook and how it has punctuated the life and relationships of – by conservative estimates – 500 million people who are active users. But Facebook as the most popular end of social media also signifies a blurring of work and leisure, formality and informality, seriousness and triviality.   Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell referred to this formation as *The Narcissism Epidemic*.

> Over the last few years, technology has allowed Americans to take self-expression to new heights with personal websites, Facebook pages, videos, and blogging. The media has also shifted towards self-expression because opinion is a lot cheaper to obtain than actual news. All this self-expression would be fine if what was expressed had some value, but that is often not the case (Twenge and Campbell, 2009, 64).

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[1] Please note that all emails are presented as they arrived in my email's inbox. However on each occasion, the name of the student has been changed.

A large section of the global population has chosen not to manage data, but to photograph it, tag it, link it, comment on it and circulate it to friends, friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends. In other words, information circulates to people we do not know.

The reason why some controversy accompanied the awarding of Zuckerberg with Person of the Year is that a majority of voters opted for another man: Julian Assange. Although allegedly charged with – depending on the report – refusing to wear a condom during sex, complaining about wearing a condom during sex or wearing a condom that broke during sex, the urgency of the extradition of Sweden and publicity that surrounded this case was not about a prophylactic. In a way though, perhaps it is. The concern and fear is a lack of barriers, to information rather than sexual pleasure.

Like Facebook, the Wikileaks scandal demonstrates the cost of merging work and leisure, with consequences for how citizens commit to and manage digitally-enabled mobile information, particularly when confidential. The accused leaker – Bradley Manning – allegedlyarrived at work with (allegedly) a Lady Gaga compact disc to listen to while on the job (Manning, 2010). Instead, the disc was blank and at least 260,000 pages of confidential diplomatic and military documents and a disturbing video of United States soldiers killing Iraqi civilians were burnt onto a CD Rom and walked out of the building under the cover of Gaga.

This was 2010. Zuckerberg and Assage captured distinct modes and relationship with data, information and knowledge. They also carried the enthusiasms of right wing and left wing libertarians in the last twenty years. For libertarians of various political persuasions, information and money can, should and must move freely between borders, even though people do not. Border management is easier than data management. The key question to ask is simply because digital information can move between platforms, should it? It is important to think about the decisions made before collecting, shaping, aggregating and disseminating. If a goal for higher education is the proliferation and dissemination of information that is consistent, rigorous, useful and verified through quality assurance protocols, then there must be recognition of the barriers and blockages that create inconsistent data streams. As the social web has proliferated, the capacity to manage information and prevent inconsistency and disintegration of data is more complex. It is also more difficult to judge and evaluate

valuable information. Therefore, in understanding the proliferation of 'the social' through working and educational environments, embodied by Facebook, it is first necessary to consider the relationship between form and content, medium and information.

Content is king in the information age. Phrases proliferate such as user generated content, content providers and content management. This means that the form, the platform and the medium have been neglected, with the fallback cliché to McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1994, 7).

> In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology (McLuhan, 1994, 7).

His argument worked well in the investigation of the electric light. It has no content. It only is "noticed as a medium" when deployed in radio and television, telegraph and telephone (McLuhan, 1994, 9).From such examples, form is content. The slippage in this argument is aggravated because it is so easy to move data across digital platforms. It literally bounces around social media. Retweeting is an effective metaphor for this practice. Indeed, when delving more deeply into McLuhan's *Understanding Media* beyond the rightly famous first chapter, a fascinating argument is offered that contributes much to new strategies for digital dieting (Brabazon, 2013). In chapter six, McLuhan explores "Media as translators." He argues that "technologies are ways of translating one kind of knowledge into another mode" (McLuhan, 1994, 56). In other words, a metaphor (medium is the message) has been tempered by the verb 'translate.' The medium is not the message. Media translate meaning. Experience is translated and this translation process enables "explicitness" (McLuhan, 1994, 57). Extending this argument, content migration between platforms ensures that the ideologies become overt through the movement.

While McLuhan provides a model of translation for social media environments, he had a senior colleague whose research is even more appropriate in providing inspiration for new models for information literacy in an era of information glut (Babe, 2008, 9-23). Publishing his last book more than sixty years ago, Harold Innis embodied a particular moment in Canadian history, thinking about cities, regions and the nation in a way that balanced the

double squeeze from Britain and the United States (Creighton, 1978). It is no coincidence that he wrote about the Greek and Roman Empires (Innis, 1972), exploring how oral communication sustains cultural practices, while written communication sustains power and respect. Offering "a plea for time" and "the problem of space," Innis took risks. He had – to summon Edward Said – a late style (Said, 2007).

A distinguished Canadian historian and political economist (Innis, 1956), in the last decade of his life, he moved from the debates and subjects where he held credibility and a reputation and entered a new field: the study of communication (Christian, 1980). At its most basic, he investigated the relationship between the medium of communication and the configuration of identity. When reviewing his career, there is an early Innis and a late Innis. His PhD investigated the building of the Canadian railway system. His other major projects explored the fur trade and cod fisheries. Innis linked transportation and communication. He was interested in how products and people move. The 'later Innis' focused on the consequences of that movement. The scale of his achievements is often undervalued (Watson, 2006) through a precursory paragraph leading into the main man: Marshall McLuhan. But Innis is much more than an academic John the Baptist to McLuhan's Jesus.

Innis was more careful than McLuhan, and more conservative. Instead of McLuhan's clichéd – and brilliant – phrase 'the medium is the message,' Innis affirmed that each communication medium has a 'bias.' McLuhan was intellectually generous to Innis and wrote an evocative and powerful introduction to *The Bias of Communication*.

> Innis takes much time to read if he is read on his own terms. That he deserves to be read on his own terms becomes obvious as soon as that experiment is tried even once. So read, he takes time but he also saves time. Each sentence is a compressed monograph. He includes a small library on each page, and often incorporates a small library of references on the same page in addition. If the business of the teacher is to save the student's time, Innis is one of the greatest teachers on record (McLuhan, 2006, 8).

McLuhan is accurate in his judgment. Innis is not easy to read. His prose is dense and he constructs intricate and understated arguments, verified by dense footnotage and examples. But there is slice of a clear and brilliant thesis that cuts through his latter works. Whether a society has a bias to space or time – geography or history – is enabled through the dominant medium of communication. A space bias, like ancient Rome, moves information through

space via the written word. The Ancient Greeks were an example of an oral society, maintaining knowledge in a community through storytelling, song and conversation (Innis, 2004).

The dominant media of a time influences the type of empire constructed. It was McLuhan who laid technological determinism over this relationship. Instead, Innis was interested in the senses: what happens when a culture is organized for the ear rather than the eye? Innis believed that the best practice was a mix of space and time-binding media (parchment and papyrus, writing and talking). This combination was a way to ensure that the biases were balanced. The dominance of the web in today's culture would worry him, but the way in which oral and aural cultures are surviving online would be of interest. For example, Google Maori was released on July 23, 2008, creating a digital Aotearoa that was distinct form e-New Zealand. The Maori language has since been added to the Google Translator toolkit. Such space-biased media can enable the survival of oral culture of formerly colonized people. There is not – yet – an Inuit Google. But Nunavut names are being added to Google Earth. Places are gaining a(n oral) history.

The embedding of time-biased sound, stories and memories into space-biased media may provide Innis's balance. For him, oral traditions blocked monopolies of knowledge. He realized, "we have no history of conversation or of the oral tradition except as they are revealed darkly through the written or the printed word" (Innis, 2006, 9). This body of research, revealing the biases of communication, emerged from Canada and specifically Toronto. The specific problem of being Canadian in the early 20th century, pulled between the Empires of Britain and the United States, was intensified in Toronto, which was so close to New York but distant from London. Above Toronto was a huge country with a small population. It was difficult and expensive to move goods, services and information through the nation. There was discontent between East and West, North and South and Quebec and the rest.

The *Bias of Communication* is an influential and incisive book to manage information obesity. One profound consequence of the read-write web is that sound and vision are embedded into space-biased media. A different way of thinking and hearing may emerge. For the management and shaping of information, his bias of communication is instructive.

The read-write web requires a balance between space and time shifting media. Innis helps scholars and citizens understand what happens when conversational media are used for more than conversation. Certainly, there are great benefits in the productive use of social media for branding, marketing and advertising. But there are extraordinary risks in information management for citizens without information literacy and without personal experience in protocols for data sharing derived from analogue and oral modes of communication. Serious mistakes are made. What happens when social media are used in education by students who do not understand the bias of communication? To provide some nested examples of what happens when the bias of communication is ignored, it is beneficial to enter Facebook. Here are some examples.

I maintain a Facebook profile. It lets me stay in touch with my family and friends in Australia and the thousands of students I have taught throughout the world. I made a single rule with regard to my students and Facebook. I never approach them to be a 'friend.' Teachers are not a student's friend. We are their teacher. However, I follow the advice of Howard Zinn, whose words commenced this article. It is important that the students know us as people, with our own family, friends, interests, laughter and life. We have many roles beyond 'teacher' and education is improved by placing learning in a wider context of life. Therefore if students approach me to be a 'friend,' then I accept. However it is important to recognize the bias of this communication system. McClard and Anderson offer a warning.

> On Facebook life is a game. Although participants can open chat windows or belong to special interest groups of a more serious nature, the daily drivers of Facebook exchanges are games and quizzes. As technology mediates more and more of our daily social exchanges, the forms of our interaction change. Gaming—light, breezy and fun interactions with friends near and far—keeps ties alive without being burdensome (2008, 10).

Communication in our daily life has light and shade, humour and seriousness. The issue is how – without oral and visual cues – the negotiation of diverse modalities is instigated. The confusion between learning and leisure is difficult, but necessary, to mediate and manage. As Christmas 2010 (that year, again) approached, something strange started to happen in the Facebook discourse.

As is common during the Christmas break, my university was closed, but my Facebook wall was open for business. Students – quite rightly – wanted help with their assignments. But

they chose not to see me during my office hours on campus before the break, not to use my virtual office hours on Skype that continued through the break, not to send an email to my work address, not to use the specifically configured online discussion forum for the course, not to send an email to Academia.edu, LinkedIn or even Facebook. Instead, they left messages about their assignments on my wall.

Under a month before Christmas 2010,Jilly wrote a message on my wall.

> Hi Tara, I am sorry to leave this sort of message on your fb, but I did try to email you and I am not sure if it worked!I am just stuck on the 2nd creative industries assignment, I have no idea where to even start! I wanted to get some kind of a plan going but now I am getting a bit worried about it. :-(X

Needless to say, no email had been sent to my work address. Intriguingly she chose not to use the cloak of email, even on Facebook. Jilly then moved exclusively to using the Facebook wall. By December 10, 2010 Jilly confused 'cheating' with inappropriate use of media platforms.

> Hey Tara, just a quick thing regarding the second assignment for Creative Industries. :-D I have decided I want to write as a person who is working to organise the 2012 Olympics, but I am having trouble thinking of a specific role! Do you have any ideas? (Sorry, I know it's kind of cheating!) X

Intriguingly, not only I helped Jilly but other students responded to her – again on my wall – offering advice. It was becoming a public notice board. Finally in the week before Christmas, Jilly stated that she had only reached 1200 words on her assignment, rather than the required 2000 words, and would that be enough?

As gently as I could, I replied that the word length is an indicator of depth of analysis, and being short of words often signifies a superficial engagement with ideas. I would have preferred this correspondence to be in private. But it was also necessary to nudge Jilly to the realization that conducting her education in public may not be a great option. She did stop using the wall. Other students did not follow her example. One of the most extraordinary was a wall post from Trish.

> Good morning! I thought I would write to you on here because then it will come straight through to my phone as I forget to check my e-mails after I send them! Anyway, I was wondering for our second assignment if we are planning on making a video how long does the video need to be?! I am really looking forward to this

assignment, it should be fun!!! Have a brilliant Christmas and I am going to try to learn how to use Skype ☺ XXX

Trish did not question the inconvenience to staff in sending an email, then forgetting to read its reply. Instead of addressing her personal matter in information and time management, she exhibited an inability to manage Facebook as well. Because it was a 'hanging' message – I replied. If I did not, it would appear to the other students that I was neglecting Trish. It was a mistake.

> Hi Trish. Lovely to hear from you. Right - the length is variable. The key is to make sure that all the criteria are managed. So - the challenge with the video is to make sure that you find a way to access the key document from the Work Foundation and an array of materials from the module. So before you start this one - think really clearly about your role. Think clearly about how you are going to present the research. Then the length might take care of itself. Hope that helps - keep in touch if I can do anything else...

She then replied, after having replicated her request where it should have been in the first place – on the course's online discussion forum in the University's learning management system.

> I didn't see you had commented on this so ignore the post on the forum! Thanks Tara. Not 100% sure if I am going to be able to pull of what I want to do in the video but I have lots of ideas. Have a lovely Christmas! x

Matters finally became serious when an MA student left a message on the wall. This was from a student who sends me three or four emails a day and uses all the office hours and virtual office hours on Skype.

> Hi Tara need suggest ,could i write in "assignment 2" in practicing media about How to use the image in the security works ,Explained at the outset the importance of visual method in general , the kinds of pictures , then go to the pictures in the security works and how important image is not only a kind of art, but in other way.

I had no idea what this post meant. At this point I replied – on Boxing Day.

> Pop me a message on the Brighton email - I can probably answer in more depth than FB will let me here! The key with the second assignment for PMR is that you demonstrate that you can use the method. That is the key. Not sure what you meant about 'security issues' But the key is to make sure that you've got all the key reading from the course and your further reading. Have a look in the course discussion forum. I posted a paper from one of our former students, Venessa Paech who got her work published. Even though it was based on ethnography – use that as a guide. And contact me via email so I can give you advice in further depth!

This appeared to stop the wall posts. But this bizarre interlude demonstrates a confusion of leisure and education, leaving messages on a platform that is easy rather than appropriate and increasing the scale, replication and plurality of information available and in circulation. These students – like so many workers and citizens – do not recognize the biases of communication and the confusion of leisure and education.

This is not merely a generational issue that involves students and teachers. Another inappropriate use of Facebook rendered this confusion of work and leisure even more bizarre. A woman who I do not know – is not a friend, 'Facebook friend' or even an acquaintance – used Facebook in an inappropriate way. On July 1, 2010, Diana Simmonds[2] send me an email through Facebook.

> Hi Tara - intrigued to know whether you actually read this book as, having ploughed through it myself, I don't recognise it as being the same one you spruiked on the dustjacket. Or am I missing something?
> Regards
> Diana Simmonds

The book to which she was referring was Professor Fred Inglis's *A short history of celebrity*, published by Princeton University Press. I was one of the academic reviewers for Princeton on this project and recognized, as the other referees must have, that it was a strong and productive monograph to understand celebrity. Princeton had used a sentence of my review – and a sentence from four other reviews – on the back flap of the book. It was odd to receive a message on Facebook from a woman I did not know who questioned my professionalism about whether or not I had read a book. This message also undermined not only Professor Inglis's work, a man whose career spans forty years and has influenced generations of scholars in media and cultural studies, but also has been acknowledged by distinguished awards for his contribution to the international academy. For a random emailer – via Facebook – to question his career and credibility is unfortunate. But Ms Simmonds also questioned the credibility of Princeton University Press, that they would present the words of an academic who had not read the book.

Mostly, I ignore such messages. My inbox – like many female writers - is a magnet for dissatisfied, radically conservative men who never quite became accustomed to women in the

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[2]   Unlike in the case of the students, I have deployed Ms Simmonds real name in this piece as she is a public figure and published an article on this topic in the public domain.

workplace or being allowed to vote, and the extreme left who believe that I am not doing enough to promote the revolution or unmask the supposedly conspiracy of September 11. But something seemed odd in this message, so I (thankfully) replied. I waited a week, and on July 7, replied to her message on Facebook.

> Hi Diana - Lovely to hear from you. Hope you are well.
> Actually Diana, I take the refereeing process for books and articles really seriously. I make sure I go through the manuscripts at least three times. So I'm assuming that you simply mis-configured this message, because you seem to be suggesting that I didn't read it! Obviously I take the professional refereeing role pretty seriously, as I am sure you   do.
> I think it is a terrific book. So much of the work on celebrity is so basic, so textual and so ahistorical, that this was a powerful corrective. Fred writes well and his scale of research I thought was outstanding. I used some of the manuscript version with my MA students and they found it great as well!
> My apologies if you did not like it - but that's the nature of reading and academic life me thinks!
> Take care and I hope all is well with you.

I tried to keep the tone friendly, but with an understated warning that it may not be useful or appropriate to send a random email to a person that she did not know questioning their professionalism. There was no reply to this message. This is important. There was no context or rationale presented for me when replying to this message. But then the actual reason for her query became clear, not via Facebook but through more traditional media.

Diana Simmonds went on to write a review of Inglis's book for *The Australian* newspaper. She did not mention this fact in the supposedly random message she sent via Facebook. However it was fortunate that I replied to her email, because her attack in print moved to another of the academic reviewers whose words appeared on the dust cover.

> **BEWARE the fulsome praise of the dust jacket spruiker who is also thanked profusely by the author in his acknowledgements page.** In this instance it means that Richard D. Brown, professor emeritus, University of Connecticut, who says Inglis's prose is 'vivacious,' is either myopic or doesn't have a problem with 70-word sentences of porridge-like density (Simmonds, 2010).

Because I answered her message and critiqued her questioning of academic professionalism, she moved targets to Richard Brown. The rest of her article is similarly scathing. But what is interesting is that she never questions her own intelligence or inability to understand Inglis's arguments. When reading the review, it is clear that Simmonds did not understand the book.

The problems are not in the monograph. The problem is a reviewer cannot understand high quality academic-level writing. To provide two more 'highlights' from the review.

> While this book might be seen as wide-ranging, the overall effect is superficial and inconsequential; ironically, a study of celebrity should, and could, be anything but. In the end this is a maddening book: It's not so much a short history as an interminable PhD thesis with flashes of insight and wit.

> But these are overwhelmed by turgid prose, excess verbiage and a bizarre, scattergun approach that misses more than it hits. So it's back to Hello! which at least knows what it's doing and why (Simmonds, 2010).

Critiquing an academic for being academic is like undermining a refuse removal specialist who knows how to handle rubbish or a furniture remover who understands how to negotiate a lounge suite out of a room. The notion that *Hello* magazine is offered as a positive comparison to a monograph that has passed through an array of scholarly readers, was published by one of the most distinguished university presses in the world and was written by one of the most important academics in the field is not only insulting, but naïve, ignorant and foolish. She does not understand the vocabulary or the complexity of the argument, terming it 'turgid' and 'scattergun.'

I had a lucky escape. If I had not replied to an unknown person on Facebook, probing their right to question an academic's integrity and commitment to refereeing, then my name may have been featured in the first paragraph of the review. Diana Simmonds is not an academic, but edits an alumni magazine for Sydney University and runs an Australian-based arts website, www.stagenoise.com. She has authored two books on Princess Diana, published in 1984 and 1995. What is intriguing in this story is not that someone wrote a bad review, but that Facebook was used to question – not even the author – but the referees. Therefore, I returned to social media on December 13, 2010 and asked her why she had contacted me on Facebook to write her review.

> Hello Tara - you must be doing an end-of-year tidy up! I was asked to review the book and as I said originally, was curious to know whether you'd read it. (I meant *this* book, ie the published version, rather than implying that you might not have read it before commenting - absolutely not!)The Facebook contact came about because, having Googled you, that's what came up first and, again, I was curious to contact you quickly.Speaking to Prof Inglis wasn't on my agenda: I don't contact authors of books when I'm reviewing their work, unless I have a specific question I

suppose (rare...) Anyway, I hope that answers your questions - Merry Christmas and a happy 2011.

Diana

Again, there was something odd here. Ms Simmonds googled me. At its highest ranking, my Facebook profile is on the fourth page of returns, following my website, my university's website, journalism, journal articles, photographs, videos and academia.edu. Facebook is not the first in any ranking involving any part of my name. I therefore contacted her again and asked if she normally contacts referees of books when she is writing a review.

Hi Tara - no, I don't (and didn't) contact "the referees and writers of the dust jacket comments" - only you, in this one instance. And that was because I was so puzzled by the book, which I found truly dreadful, but that's me and obviously not you, and I was curious about "Tara Brabazon". It actually crossed my mind that such a glorious name might be a figment of the author's imagination: she sounds like a Bond heroine, or someone out of a Waugh country house weekend. I'm sorry, but at that point I was unaware of your work and its seriousness. When I did discover that I was even more curious because, as already said, I think the book is a mess of missed opportunities. And it is not unknown for authors to nick nice-sounding quotes from unaware authorities - I was checking. Diana

Oh dear. So Facebook, a hyper-personal networking site, has been deployed for fact checking. That she does not know who I am is no surprise. But what is curious is that I was the only woman and the only Australian whose comments featured on the book cover, and I was the only person she contacted before submitting her a review in *The Australian* newspaper. The comments about Bond and Waugh are irrelevant. What is most sad is that Diana Simmonds has doubted the professionalism and integrity of Professor Fred Inglis and Princeton University Press, suggesting that they might 'nick' quotations. The speed at which she could contact me via Facebook has blocked a consciousness and reflection on her decision making about her capacity to either understand the book or desire to question the integrity of authors, publishers and referees.

At that point, I stopped the correspondence. A woman who was completing a review of a book that she did not like contacted a referee of the monograph via Facebook to check if the statement was real. She offered the excuse that Facebook was the first mention of my name via the Google Search engine. That is incorrect, and has been incorrect for six years. It is still incorrect. But what Facebook has enabled is an inappropriate judgment – about a

distinguished scholar and important international publisher – to be activated at speed to a person that she does not know. If Facebook did not exist, Simmonds would have to think about why a range of international scholars considered this work of quality and importance, while she had difficulty with the sentence construction.   Simmonds mismanaged communication systems, conflating the bias of orality with the permanence of print, delivered at speed via social media.

Clay Shirky stated that "the social use of our new media tools have been a big surprise, in part because the possibility of those uses wasn't implicit in the tools themselves" (Shirky, 2010, 14). There is nothing 'in' Facebook that suggested that students would leave questions on academics' walls or that a book reviewer would contact one of the referees to probe their professionalism and/or existence. David Buckingham, while focusing on children, stated that "advocates of educational technology have frequently looked to children's leisure-time experiences as a source of new approaches to learning" (Buckingham, 2007). But as shown by the examples in this chapter, there are consequences for all education when blurring learning and leisure and work and leisure. It is a seemingly easy way to motivate and scaffold literacy from commonsensical to specialist strategies for encoding and decoding, yet the cost I am seeing is a lack of reflection and consciousness in platform selection, modality and professional appropriateness. The problem is not the platform but the lack of information literacy to use it. The speed and ease of contact between people who are active in social media reduces the time to think about how and why it is necessary to post, comment or message.

This confusion of purpose and compression of time creates little except more work for academics, embarrassment for students and demonstrates a widening absence in information literacy and an inability to manage Innis's bias of communication. I have 800 friends on Facebook: from students I taught in Wellington in 1994 through to my 85 year old father.   I actually know all my friends. But even with this provision in place, it is important to remember that if any teacher or educational institution enters social media then there are public relations risks. There will always be someone calling a teacher Hitler, a slapper or crack head, just because they happen to disagree with their views. But when inexperienced users – who may be young and without any sense of the consequences of their behaviour - leave messages that require a response for public relations purposes as much as personal care,

the pressure of moving what should be confidential and private information into the public domain is embarrassing at the very least and destructive at worst. Similarly – and disturbingly – the consequences need to be addressed when choosing not to reply to a message from a woman who did not declare she was writing a review, yet asked direct questions of my professionalism, but was supposedly confirming whether I was an imaginary figure from an Evelyn Waugh novel.

This is not a generational issue. All of us work with men and women who insist on clicking 'reply all' to emails because they think it shows their wit and power. It demonstrates the exact opposite. Therefore, the medium is not the message, but such a slogan blocks a consciousness of the complex decisions made both before and after platform selection. From this confusion of leisure and learning, and recognizing the value of Harold Innis to contemporary discussions of platform selection, my piece asks that information literacy remains the bedrock of our teaching and research in higher education, rather than a fetishization of the new, the fast, the shiny and the popular.

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