

Emily Kilmer

Tetrads Essay

2/13/19

Introduction:

Being someone that has a great passion for travel and actually has the idea of becoming a travel agent in the future, a medium that involves traveling and booking trips is extremely interesting to me. The app, Airbnb, has become more popular in recent years and can be a very useful tool when it comes to booking trips and vacations. Airbnb was created in 2008 and still strives to “create a world where anyone can belong anywhere” (Airbnb, n.d.) through the use of rental properties. This app allows individuals to search for countries across the world to rent the perfect home for their needs or go out of their comfort level and experience something new. With four million listings and 640,000 hosts (Smith, 2019), Airbnb is bound to have something for each and every adventurer. Marshall McLuhan’s studies of media in society provide awareness of how we are impacted each day by communication, and with the use of his tetrad theory, it is clear just how much the process behind travel has changed and how it came to what it is today.

Theory:

Marshall McLuhan’s ideas and understandings about media help us to fully understand the media platforms used every day and how they evolve through time. According to Bennett & Syme, McLuhan found that, “four things happen to all media and human artifacts”, and that these things happen simultaneously and are inevitable. McLuhan’s tetrads theory asks individuals to question how a medium can be enhanced, what it retrieves, what it can be flipped into, and what it makes obsolete. By answering these questions, people have better knowledge of the media they use and how their lifestyle can adjust through generations. McLuhan had also placed these four ideas into two subcategories to give an even further explanation to what they meant. The ideas of Figure and Ground define whether the tetrads are easily noticed by society or if they are in the

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background, not noticed. He states that “the figure is what appears and the ground is always subliminal” (Logan, 2011). The concepts of enhancement and retrieval are associated with the idea of figure due to the fact that people can physically see a change and these are the reasons that we like the medium. The concepts of flipping and obsolescence fit into the category of ground in the way that they are not noticed right away, instead more of an idea in the background.

McLuhan (n.d.) described that ground “provides the structure of awareness” meaning that ground comes first and allows us to be able to sense the media.

Analysis:

Enhancement

Airbnb has definitely made the travel experience a little easier for everyone across the world. According to Folger (2018), Airbnb is beneficial for travelers through the idea that it is affordable, cultural, and offers specific accommodations for individuals. McLuhan’s concept of enhancement focuses on the idea of how the medium will make any experience better. Airbnb’s goal is to make the experience of every traveler great, and they do this through their affordable prices, simple processes, and referable reviews. Reviews are super helpful in the process of traveling to understand how pleasant a listing is and how favorable a host is. The app also enhances the communication between guests and hosts as many Airbnb hosts live close by and are easily accessible in order to accommodate their guests. Also, Airbnb enhances the process of booking a trip through the easily navigable website and app that directs customers through the quick steps of booking a room rather than going through several websites.

Retrieval

McLuhan’s idea of retrieval refers to the fact that new mediums borrow from the ideas of older technology and behavior. Airbnb is a build on the idea of bed and breakfasts that may not

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be as popular today as in the past through the practice of hosts serving their guests breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Retrieval can be portrayed through Airbnb due to the fact that individuals are once again booking their trips on their own, without the use of a travel agent. Before travel agents came into play, people relied on themselves to find a room that accommodate their needs and could have been very difficult without the use of helpful filters that Airbnb provides. Another behavior that is retrieved through the use of Airbnb is that people are being a little less cautious and more adventurous. Individuals may be less inclined to focus on the neatness of the listing or how good the reviews of the host are if they are getting a good deal or a gorgeous view. It seems like this behavior was practiced years ago and is now making a comeback on Airbnb.

Flipping

The concept of flipping stems from the idea that, “when a technology is pushed to its limit, it risks reversing the target audience’s enthusiasm for its original benefits into opposite emotions” (ProvenModels, n.d.) Though this idea has not been clearly presented yet, it could be seen through the fact that if Airbnb becomes the main source of travel accommodation, travel agents, hotel employees, and reviewers. Without so much business with these types of companies, there may no longer be a need for this type of employment. Another disadvantage that could come from using Airbnb is that safety could be an issue. There is not an in-depth process to become a host, so this could lead to some potentially dangerous or unsanitary conditions for some guests that maybe don’t do a great amount of research on a listing or host.

Obsolescence

McLuhan’s interpretation of obsolescence focuses on how a medium has the potential to outdate another type of media. As it was mentioned previously, the use of Airbnb could make travel accommodation jobs such as travel agents, bed and breakfast owners, and hotel employees

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obsolete. It will no longer be necessary to use a travel agent as guests are now able to plan out a place to stay on their own. Also, classy bed and breakfasts are available at a much cheaper rate through Airbnb, making it less probable that someone would take the more expensive option. Hotels are also a more complicated route for travelers and individuals would be more likely to choose a simple, relaxed process when booking a trip.

Evaluation:

Airbnb seems to have more benefits than disadvantages. After downloading and researching the app for personal use, it appears to be an extremely helpful tool for travelers on a budget with specific ideas about a trip. Even though it's possible that it could lead to less jobs for people, it is probable that more individuals in society could be making money through renting out their own spaces. It could be imagined that this medium will become far more significant as more of the population becomes familiar with the concept of using it not only for pleasure, but business as well.

Conclusion:

Overall, Airbnb is a constructive app that provides several changes to the idea of booking travel through the media. It has made it far more convenient to book a place to stay at a rate that will please everyone and provide the perfect accommodations. The accessible app has made traveling more amusing and less stressful through the use of renting rooms, houses, igloos, tree houses, furnished caves, and boats. It is clear to see that the use of this medium is on the rise as 98% of the world are able to connect (Gumport, 2018). McLuhan's four tetrads are a useful piece in media to get a better understanding of the evolution of media and the components of it.

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