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The Smallest Smart Phone: A Media Effects Tetrad Analysis of the Apple Watch

Introduction

In a world with the need for constant connection Apple Watch provides another quick and convenient way of communication in a variety of features such as phone calls, text messages and reading emails. Apple Watch has the concept of a smart phone with the combination of a fit bit. The new Apple Watch Series 7 is “The future of health. On full display.” (Apple Watch 2021). The first Apple Watch was originally presented and marketed as a fashion accessory in September 2014 and was released in April 2015 with the focus shifted to fitness features. (Apple Watch 2021). In 2018 the Apple Watch was focused on one’s well-being such as new features like Fall Detection, Emergency SOS, and ECG generation. This provided a sense of comfort and peace of mind in situations as well as appealing to a larger audience. The new series has blood oxygen level, focuses on good health not only exercising but also such as tracking your sleep, connecting with your emergency services, different strength training workouts, water resistant, watches your heart rates, and staying in touch with available cellular. (Apple Watch 2021). Using Marshall McLuhan’s Four Effects model, this essay will delve into how Apple Watch enhances, retrieves, reverses, and obsolesces aspects of communication and media.

Theory

Marshall McLuhan was a media scholar who developed the Four Effects model. The Four Effects model was set to examine media in their historical context and present environment as well as attributes of the medium itself. These effects include enhancement, obsolescence,

retrieval, and reversal. McLuhan is known for the idea of, “The medium is the message” (McLuhan & McLuhan, p.5). This message shows that what is more important than the message is how you are receiving the message. The idea of, “the medium is the message” needed to be scientifically proven.

“They can be asked (and the answers checked) by anyone, anywhere, at any time, about any human artefact. The tetrad was found by asking, 'What general, verifiable (that is, testable) statements can be made about all media?’” (McLuhan & McLuhan, p.7).

McLuhan then posed four questions: what does the medium enhance? What does the medium retrieve? What does the medium flip into? What does the medium make obsolete? McLuhan states that all human media will follow those four laws.

“Enhancement consists in intensifying some aspect of a situation, of extending a sense of configuration of senses, of turning an element of ground into figure or of further intensifying something already figure.” In social media enhancement would be how does the medium extend our everyday lives. “Obsolescence refers to rendering a former situation impotent by displacement: figure returns to ground.” (McLuhan & McLuhan, p.227). The medium would have to be replacing a former medium.

“Retrieval is the process by which something long obsolete is pressed back into service, revived, a dead disease now made safe, ground becomes figure through the new situation.” The medium would have to retrieve an idea. “Reversal involves dual action simultaneously, as figure and ground reverse position and take on a complementary configuration. It is the peak of form, as it were, by overload.” (McLuhan & McLuhan, p.228). The medium would have to flip into its opposite form.

McLuhan also discusses hot vs cold media. Hot media requires a lot of stimuli, little active participation from the audience, and the audience does not have to fill in many gaps from the medium. Cold media has very little stimuli, requires a lot of activity from the listener, invites the users to participate in the medium, and has the audience fill in the gaps of the medium. Apple Watch could be seen as both hot and cold media. I, however, believe that Apple Watch is a cold medium. Apple Watch requires active movement and participation from the user such as exercises and active messaging. Apple Watch invites the user to use the features and apps provided from Apple. This requires the participant to interact with the media whereas for example with television you do not have to actively participate or pay attention.

Apple Watch Analysis: Enhancement

Why Apple Watch? “It’s the ultimate device for a healthy life.” (Apple Watch 2021). The Apple Watch has many benefits. The new series has blood oxygen level, focuses on good health not only exercising, tracking your sleep, connect with your emergency services, different strength training workouts, water resistant, watches your heart rates, and staying in touch with available cellular. (Apple Watch 2021). Tim Cook the Chief Executive Officer of Apple states “If you sort of zoom out to the future and you ask, what has Apple’s greatest contribution been? It will be in the health area, the wellness-and health area.”

One of the most alluring features is how the Apple Watch is “a fitness partner that fits on your wrist.” (Apple Watch 2021). The Apple Watch has activity rings that show your daily activities such as move, exercise and stand. The rings help keep individuals motivated and have personalized coaching and competitions. The personalized coaching also includes strength training workouts, HIIT yoga and personalized workouts from five to forty-five minutes and include guided meditations so you can do a workout wherever you are.

Apple Watch is “always looking out for you” (Apple Watch 2021). The Apple Watch focuses on individuals’ health such as watching your heart rate and recognizing symptoms and irregularities. This helps with notifying the individual so they can take the precautions needed such as consulting a doctor. The Apple Watch includes a sleep app that helps keep track of your sleep schedule as well as helping create a regular bedtime routine. This is especially beneficial to those who struggle with insomnia. Another benefit is the ability to “get help when you need it” (Apple Watch 2021). The Apple Watch Series 7 can detect a hard fall and can connect you with emergency services if you are unable. This will benefit you to receive immediate medical help in an emergency.

Apple Watch also cares about your mental health as well as your physical. The Apple Watch has a feature that helps you take time out of your day to reflect on your mindfulness. The ‘Breathe’ feature helps one focus, center, and connect with the world. (Apple Watch 2021). Apple Watch also focuses on your health and wellness by tracking your menstrual cycle and protecting your hearing from loud sounds by alerting you of long-term exposure to sounds that could affect one’s hearing. The Apple Watch even has reminders for washing your hands.

The Apple Watch also consists of cellular data to help stay connected through phone calls, text messages and reading emails. The Apple Watch always allows for constant communication and access to technology while being on your wrist.

Retrieval

Apple Watch retrieves the first creation of a watch. The first watch was created to navigate at sea as a precise navigation tool. (Prisma Watches, 2021). Our world has become connected by technology and social media with the pressure of being expected to be on time for everything because of the constant access to technology. Social media platforms have taken more

of individuals' time away from mental and physical health. "If you're spending an excessive amount of time on social media and feelings of sadness, dissatisfaction, frustration, or loneliness are impacting your life, it may be time to re-examine your online habits and find a healthier balance." (Robinson 2022). The Apple Watch has provided a way to take individuals' minds off social media by reminding them of the importance of their physical and mental health through daily activities.

Reversal/Flip into

Although Apple's mission is "to bring the best personal computing products and support to students, educators, designers, scientists, engineers, businesspersons and consumers in over 140 countries around the world." (Apple 2021). Apple Watch focuses on communication through the constant access of text messages, phone calls and emails. Although, this is designed to help you stay connected conveniently while keeping track of your mental and physical health it could lead to struggling with one's mental health. Some individuals have what is called phantom phone syndrome which is when smartphone and smartwatch users are so alert to incoming messages, they sometimes feel their devices vibrate when they don't. Some individuals detect a buzz even when the devices are put away. Psychologist Michelle Drouin says, "This could really be categorized as a hallucination. You're feeling something that does not exist." (Hernandez 2019). By having access to messages, phone calls and emails even when one does not have their phone could lead to a heightening of phantom phone syndrome. Phantom phone syndrome (PVS) is an emerging disorder due to overuse of mobile phones. Which could continue to develop as technology continues to grow.

Obsolescence

As Apple Watches are a newer technology that is always changing its features it is hard to be certain if Apple Watches will make smart phones and current watches obsolete. However, a report by Strategy Analytics revealed that in 2019 Apple Watch sold more units than the entire Swiss watch industry. (Dans, E. 2020). With Apple Watch continuing to expand with new features, current watches will most likely become more unheard of and seen as 'old fashioned.' Although the watch industry does represent heritage and being passed down from families to families, it will not be enough to stop the increase of the purchases of Apple Watch. The Apple Watch provides more than time.

Evaluation

As individuals are spending more time on social media, employees spending more time at work and students spending more time at school, we need a technological device that makes sure our physical and mental health are still above all. The Apple Watch provides features that could save one's life such as watching blood oxygen levels, heart rates, tracking ones' sleep and connecting with emergency services. (Apple Watch 2021). Although Apple Watch could cause a reliability on media it could also be the alert needed to save your life. It is a good idea to use Apple Watch for one's physical health, but Apple could come up with new features to focus more on mental health as well. Apple Watch should include new apps such as the app *Calm*. *Calm* is an app that focuses on anxiety and how to handle it. I believe Apple Watch is heading in the correct direction to be a positive impact on mental health in the future. If they continue to focus on their 'Breathe' feature of helping one focus, center, and connect with the world, Apple Watch could be extremely successful.

Conclusion

Apple Watch, founded in 2014, is a wearable smartwatch that allows users to accomplish a variety of tasks, including making phone calls, sending text messages, and reading emails. (Apple Watch 2015). Apple Watch provides fitness support and life changing features to protect individuals. This essay analyzed Apple Watch by applying Marshall McLuhan's Media Effects model. Media Effects model states the medium should enhance, should retrieve, should flip, and make another medium obsolete. The Apple Watch enhances physical health, constant communication, and life changing features. It also retrieves the idea of the original watch while adding new features and could flip into mental health issues. Lastly, Apple Watch could make Swiss watches become less of a usage which could mean less traditions and history carried through families.

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