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Research Essay: Effects of Social Media on Postmodernism.

Communication has proved to be an important factor in the propagation of philosophical, cultural or religious ideas over the centuries. In ancient times, human interaction was considered as one of the most effective means of communication but with the passage of time, as human civilization progressed, the means of communication with which ideas were circulated also changed. This paper will discuss the different aspects of social media in the context of post-modern communication. The criticism of post-modernism by David Foster Wallace will also be discussed in accordance with the media of his time. Other criticisms based on the mental health of the generations are also discussed.

In the twenty first century, ideas such as post-modernism have been propagated through one of the most post-modern forms of communication, also known as social media. There was a time when electronic media and paper media was considered as one of the most important mediums of information sharing, but those days are now long gone. The era of networking has made the world a global village. You will hardly find a city in the world which does not have internet access. Any sort of information whether it be related to the personal life or public life has become content for our news feed. As far as the idea of truth from a post-modern point of view is concerned, the idea is that objective truth does not exist. All truth that exists in this world is subjective in nature. Some post-modernists, however, do share the idea that a sense of objective truth does exist in several different ideologies.

Post-modernism, as the name suggests, is the ideology that developed after the era of modernism in the twentieth century, defined by broad cynicism, subjectivism, and a general attitude of doubt of logic and reason (“Postmodernism | Definition, Doctrines, & Facts”). Cynicism is the idea of believing that human beings are only motivated by ideas of self-interest and the need of feeling good about themselves. Such an approach can also be termed as skepticism i.e. being overly critical about everything and everyone. In the twenty-first century, post-modern style of thinking has taken the shape of a nihilistic cynicism. The search for the eternal questions of objective reality and meaning in life has been abandoned. Every single event, be it social or political in nature does not go by without the post-modernist feeling a sense of sub-conscious irony. Such an approach has had its fair share of representation on social media. Such post-modern cynicism has had a very depressive effect on human nature and personality. The lack of certainty makes every single idea, thought, and action meaningless and worthless. David Foster Wallace, who was one of the most influential writers on the downside of post-modern theory was very critical of the post-modern thoughts of cynicism and irony. He says that cynicism and irony can be seen as tools to deconstruct reality and to critique it but that these concepts do not attempt to provide a coherent solution to the said problems. In his conceptualization of the adverse effects of post-modern thought, the abundance of cynical and ironic media outlets and the lack of sincerity towards the solution was the main issue that was leading the American society towards severe mental depression. His proposal for the solution towards a more optimistic sort of mentality was that television sitcoms and movies should move away from the old school thought of cynicism and irony towards a more positive idea of sincerity. He believed that the medium of television should be used to spread hope and optimism. His influence can be seen in American television to this day through sitcoms like Parks and Recreation. Social media is, by far, the most postmodern form of communication because it has been able to totally replace the traditional forms of communication.

Social media, if analyzed, can be seen as one of the most perfect depictions of post-modernism. Every philosophy, idea, religion or thought is being challenged and is thus making the post-modernist thought a reality. Due to this very fact, social media has been the main reason for world-wide propagation of post-modern ideas of cynicism and irony. The meme culture that has taken over the world is one of the most observable ways of analyzing the effects of post-modern thought. The use of humor based on irony and cynicism is one of the most common types of humor seen on social media. One aspect that is generally overlooked is its aesthetic similarity to the theory of modernism. Both of them can be seen as aesthetic theories based more on feelings than on first principles. The effects of social media have seen the young people of the world growing pessimistic in nature and becoming prone to identity crisis resulting in greater mental health issues. The transformation of social media from pessimistic, cynicism-based humor towards sincerity and positivity is necessary in order to make the environment less taxing on the minds of suffering youth. The increase of self-esteem issues, behavioral issues, and trends of loneliness can be shown as the main results of such nihilistic ideas (Aylesworth). Due to the excessive use of social media, social traits required for traditional communication and the development of inter-personal connections have been reduced to a bare minimum. The social implications of this include a lack of people who are fit to work in taxing positions to lack of temperament and inter-personal skills.

Not only has social media affected our communication skills but it has also taken its toll on the reading habits of people. The culture of reading books has been sacrificed for the culture of taking interest in everyone else’s life. Books have been replaced with tablets. Social media has had a kind of a democratic effect on the lives of people. The issues of morality, though long forgotten, make people think about the unanswered questions. The questions which were once addressed in meaningful novels and literary items are now a part of the long-lost history. Social media lacks the use of logic and embraces contradictions which exist in the heart of post-modern thought. Communication has been stripped down to its barest identity. Any kind of gossip, opinion, personal news, rhetoric, revelation or comment has become element for our news feeds. The filtering of news through proper channels and checking authenticity has become an unknown approach (Lindas). Anything can be considered as legitimate news on social media. The difference between consumer and producer has been minimized by social media. Through the very build of social media, the traditional values of community development through social interaction have been halted. The next generation is more depressed and has an even lower self-esteem. The effects on human psychology due to these tools of post modernism are considered as disastrous, as the loneliness that one feels with only having a screen as a friend.

The lack of objectivity, truth, sincerity and solutions make social media a breeding ground for post-modern thought. Writers who have been critical of post-modern thought have often use arguments based on the lack of meaning, empathy, love and self-esteem to substantiate the claim that ideologies such as post-modernism do not cater for the mental needs of the people. That is, the idea that these ideologies do not provide any answer to its follower but is just busy in trying to critique and destroy other ideologies which attempt to produce any kind of answers for humanity (Burrell). Following such a worldview without any emotional anchor can ultimately result in a man losing his will to live. The prevalent self-deprecating humor that is generally seen as part of sitcoms is also a very bad influence towards the growing minds of the youth. Websites such as Facebook have been investigated by the American congress about how does the company define its community guidelines and what type of content is allowed on the social networking site and what is not. This resulted in an ambiguous declaration by the company’s founder Mark Zuckerberg that the company does not take responsibility for the content on its site and was then left speechless when asked about its community guidelines. Such an agenda can prove to be disastrous as it can cause the demise of the human population. The essence of education is to make the human mind functional, whereas, social media tends to go the other way. One of the biggest and yet unanswered questions on post-modernism remains to be its relativist culture, i.e. its hostile behavior towards the notion of objectivity. This attitude is used as the way of undermining different ideologies which claim to be an absolute ideology. Such an approach makes a person so narrow minded that even when analyzing social ideologies that claim to be absolutely true while attempting to provide some sort of evidence for their truth, the person simply does not care to look into the evidences because of post-modern presuppositions.

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