

Introduction

Hello. In this video, we're going to talk about the media, and about its role in society, its reality, its history, and to finish, we'll talk about the place of the consumer in front of that complex player.

1. The role of the media

Across the world, the media has one absolute and universal role. It passes on information, but this is where it gets complicated. How and for what reason does it take on this role of information transmission? Seen as hero of modern times when reporting a live event, we accuse it of manipulation when it fails to cover a story that is dear to us, or worse still, when it does cover it, but gives misinformation. Generally, we can react in two ways.

The first possible reaction

"That MOOC on consumption was so interesting. That's the first time I've heard about it. Is there a phone out there that respects man and the environment?" In this video, the person finds out about something, and reacts by searching for a solution.

The second possible reaction

"That MOOC on consumption was so interesting. That's the first time I've heard about it. Why isn't the media talking about it? There isn't a label or a standard to encourage good practice? It's outrageous. There's nothing we can do about it." In this video, the person finds out about something, but criticises without reacting, and doesn't consider his own role in events. Are we really powerless? To answer this question, let's take a look at the media reality and history.

2. The reality of media

Is it the media's job to be all-knowing, and all-telling? No. The media has its limitations. It's not always possible to cover all of the news. An investigation needs time and expertise. The editorial staff hasn't always got somebody with the necessary skills and sensitivity to analyse a topic. However, we could also say "Yes", because the media will always end up knowing about a big story that falls within its area of competence. The truth is, a story's coverage depends on the media's independence in regards to its shareholders, its advertisers, and also its subscribers. Have a search on the internet for a video that demonstrates this fact. This is an extract from a programme transmitted in June 2015, where the head of the French TV channel M6 admits censoring certain journalists, because he didn't want to report bad things about his clients.

3. The history of media

To round up this simplified presentation of the reality of the media, let's look at how its capacity to act has evolved. We're not looking to demonise it, we're just trying to understand its limitations. Overloaded as we are with information, it's difficult to imagine a world without it. However, the written word has existed for less than 6000 years, and the printing press for less than 600. Three centuries after its invention, printing played a paramount role in the sharing of the modern ideas during the Enlightenment. They are the bedrock of European revolutions and of the universal principle of human rights. In Paris, in 2015, freedom of expression will have existed for 226 years, freedom of the press and the right to education, for 134 years. These freedoms and rights have been internationally recognised by the United Nations for 67 years. Reserved for a long time for the privileged few, information has, little by little, become democratised.

During the twentieth century, it has become accessible to the masses, thanks to newspapers, radio, television and the internet. The internet is a tool that has changed everything. It undermines the balance of freedom. Today, we can read, comment, publish, and like articles. Everyone shares and explains their knowledge, their know-how, their feelings to the whole world. It's free and available to everyone. Finally we participate in information, but it's not all positive. We can also share our mistakes, our ignorance, and sometimes our hate. We can also publish out-of-date or incorrect information, based on shoddy articles, as well as impair the visibility of quality articles. In the end, we have at our disposal, not a greater wealth of information, but a greater disorganisation of information, that often leads to a standardisation of information.

"All that increases freedom increases responsibility" warned Victor Hugo. Thanks to the internet, an extraordinary emancipation of everyday freedom of expression is developing a new model of responsibility. Understanding the reality and the history of the media exposes the eternal limits of its role. It informs, but isn't decisive. Its role depends on how it is used by the people. What does that mean?

4. The media is the people.

It's not enough to moan that something is outrageous, and that there's nothing we can do about it, like we saw in the first video, an action must call for a constructive reaction. Pepe Mujica, the ex-president of Uruguay said: "Only losers stop fighting." The quality of information depends on how it is used. Conscientious citizens will always be ahead of those that are passive in their consumption. Wasn't that what the MOOC was saying?

Reread the titles of the past six weeks, keeping in mind that the media is the people, and even more so, that consumption is the people. To find out more, look on the internet for the "Nouveaux Chiens de Garde" map published in 2011 by Le Monde Diplomatique. It shows the main players in the French press. By the way, and to conclude, I suggest that you take a look at Paul Virilio's book, "L'Administration de la Peur" It talks about the spread of fear brought about by information overload.

