HAS CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL MEDIA CULTURE FUNDAMENTALLY TRANSFORMED THE WAYS IN WHICH PEOPLE CONSTRUCT THEIR IDENTITIES?

Hi, I'm Jean, and today I'm going to explore a remarkable social change that has been transforming the way in which humans live. Around 20 years ago, digital technology advanced to a point where human interaction with both the physical and intellectual world underwent a dramatic shift. The contemporary digital media culture responsible for this shift now underpins the way people construct their identities.

So how does modern digital media culture transform the process of constructing identity? Smith and Watson point out that identity - the self, the "I" - is never a natural entity, but is a social and historical construct. The western world has an entrenched, top-down tradition where, according to Gauntlett, expert producer/creators form an elite that controls the flow of products, information, and skills to what he describes as a passive, relatively powerless 'receiver' audience of consumers. For this reason, and I quote from The Critical Media Project, '[s]ocial and cultural identity is inextricably linked to issues of power, value systems, and ideology'. Any change in these relationships will impact on the construction of identity.

Under the impetus of changing technology, traditional structure is also changing. Gauntlett argues Web 2 is essentially democratic, not elitist, and Grinnell points out that the distinction between producer and audience is becoming blurred. The old dichotomy between producer and consumer, according to Bruns, is being replaced by 'produsers' who both produce and consume. John Naughton argues, and I quote, that a 'new ecosystem ... richer, more diverse and immeasurably more complex' is developing. The old paradigm is being turned on its head as a new and radically different culture develops.

Those most disadvantaged and isolated by the old structures that underpin traditional power relationships are now actively challenging them. This includes a wide spectrum of disparate groups, but I want to focus on indigenous Australians, and the way the least historically powerful, the least visible, and the most racially vilified social and cultural group in Australia, is constructing a new and powerful identity.

Digital media culture does not permit indigenous issues to be quarantined. Indigenous Australians are assertively injecting themselves into Australian political and social debate. . Today, they advocate for themselves. They construct their own authentic identities, not the paternalistic constructs of hostile Europeans , made even before invasion, and which, more than we like to admit, resulted in horrific, and unacknowledged acts of genocide (Tatz).

In the debate over Treaty and Constitutional change, the Uluru Statement is recognised as expressing the position of indigenous groups. Unlike previous experience, however, attempts to misrepresent indigenous attitudes are failing, because the actual words, in the voices of those who speak them, can be readily accessed via the Web's alternative media.

Public outrage at the treatment of indigenous youths in the Don Dale correctional facility forced change. Indigenous communities, have harnessed the ubiquitous mobile phone to protect community members from inappropriate conduct of officials and police. Governments can no longer decieve Australians as they did with the 1967 referendum, or hide policies such as those that culminated in the tragedy of the Stolen Generations.

Action and interaction characterise the 'produser', and this also characterises the collaborative participation of indigenous Australians in Web 2. Their involvement is extensive and varied. A random and rapid selection of posts on Twitter, will reveal how sophisticated, collaborative, creative and diverse they are. T

My generation is uniquely placed in relation to comprehending the significance of these social changes. We grew up in the world BDT – before digital technology. Our identities developed under, and at times in conflict with, top-down power structures: the majority of us were not produsers, but passive consumers.

Today, the structures that emerged alongside the development of literacy, are being challenged and replaced. The transition to a society that is based on digital media, with all that this implies, is revolutionary. We are constructing our identities in a totally new way. The impact of the shift we are experiencing will be in the long term greater than the changes that occurred in the pre-literate world as it made its transition to structures newly re-organised to accommodate changing social relationships.

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