Personalization

Joseph Turow  
*University of Pennsylvania, jturow@asc.upenn.edu*

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and thus its very uttering performs othering. Within Latins/o/a studies, tamanho (2003) expands Irwin and Gal’s (2009) theorization of othering populations according to language to study the eternal foreigner status of US Latin/o/a, who are permanently othered within popular discourse despite the presence of Anglos in the national territory (Valdés 2010). US television practitioners regularly frame Latin/o/as as “Spaniard-speaking despite statistical evidence to the contrary. This practice underwrites Latin/o/as and undercuts profit potential for mainstream media. US-born Latin/o/a youth reject this form of ghettosiation as they wish to be part of the mainstream. Latin/o/a reporters are either suspected of compromising objectivity because of their ethnicity within the mainstream press or relegated to working in the ethnic press—a classic form of othering. Similar findings apply to African Americans, Asian Americans, and, with a vengeance, Native Americans and the media. Finally, othering also occurs in relation to audiences. Audiences perceived as marginal are either ignored or underserved through less or hard-to-reach content. Furthermore, research on audiences seldom includes marginalized people in the sample.

Othering also applies to gender and sexuality studies. The second wave women’s movement included the creation of Ms. magazine in 1972, representing a liberal feminist effort to have a presence within a mainstream that generally othered women’s issues and news. Feminist media, however, has not been immune to othering. Women of color, women of the Global South, queer women, transwomen, differently abled women, and to on an underrepresented in media jobs, in images, and in desired audiences, and also have been misunderstood and underrepresented within feminist media studies. Conferences, special journal issues, and edited collections seek to interrupt this process of othering. Whereas postcolonial theory has been highly influential in feminist media studies, the academy as a site of employment of postcolonial female scholars has been less hospitable.

Posting social movements—as in postfeminism and poststructuralism—is another form of othering. Neoliberal ideology replaces their political thrust in favor of individu- 1 2

ualism and market/consumer satisfactions. Poststructuralists frame feminism as “extreme, difficult, and unpalatable” (Tucker and Naga 2007). Similarly poststructural feminist scholars (Mahousse 2010) replace the discussion of racial inequality with rational measures that reframe the interests of neoliberal capitalism and render racial equality once more to the margins—othered. In sum, othering reinforces power oppression and discrimination.

Importantly, the text or media studies is also interested in othering through its disciplinary organizations, categories of study, and journals of note. For example, social science approaches other humanistic ones by neglecting them to the margins, and the lack of attention to “othered” areas in prestigious venues like the Journal of Communication has necessitated the creation of journals such as Feminist Media Studies to circulate marginalized research.

45

Personalization

Joseph Tuzow

Personalization is a term used by contemporary media practitioners to describe the emerging process by which a media organization tailors the content an individual receives based on attributes the organization believes it knows about the individual. Although the idea of personalization in performance goes back to its origin, the notion of personalization as a practical activity in media industries is relatively new. Currently practiced most commonly in advertising, personalization is also showing up in other genres of media content, including music services and video games.

Interpersonal or handcrafted performance often involves personalization. A storyteller’s selection of a narrative and the manner of recounting sympathy reflects the speaker’s beliefs about the listener. An artist creating material for a patron is likely to choose the topic and perhaps even the form based on the perception of the patron’s interests, the size or product and services also traditionally involved personalized elements. Records datable to biblical times show that merchants have adjusted the choice of merchandise, its price, and even the location to combating the same based on an understand- ing of the particular shopper.

New technologies tied to steam or electrical power that evolved from the nineteenth century through much of the twentieth involved as part of communication in a decidedly nonpersonalized direction. Tied to large industries, media of those decades had the capa-

ibility to reach more people, and more people within shorter periods of time, than any storytelling platforms in history. The term academics used to describe these activities—mass communication—evoked huge audi- ences of disconnected, faceless individuals. Charles R. Wright’s (1959) model of the process reflected the consumer that when “feedback” takes place in mass communication, it involves nothing like the real-time adjustments inherent in one-to-one or even group communication.

Developments during the 1990s and 2000s began to challenge the view that dominant public communication technologies reached mainly broad audiences. The period saw the US Federal Communica- tions Commission allocate many additional broadcast television frequencies (in the UHF band), the privatiza- tion of broadcasting in many parts of Europe and the concurrent multiplication of radio and TV outlets, the spread of cable and satellite television, and the popular- ity of the video cassette recorder. The 1990s and 2000s saw an even greater multiplication of platforms and channels. Much of that growth came from the diffusion of the desktop and laptop computer to the home and its connection to the Internet (especially email and the World Wide Web). The late 1990s and 2000s witnessed the spread of mobile “smartphones” and tablets in many countries. These technologies further extended people’s abilities to access and interact with (and to provide immediate feedback to) an increasingly broad gamut of entertainment, news, and information landscape.

The population’s interactions with new media forms upended the venues held by many media content dis- tributors (that is, “publishers”) about the best ways to reach audiences and make money from them. One change was that so much material on the web was “free”, it could be accessed with no direct cost to the audi- ence member. An upset was that many traditional
sequences to individuals based on their particular deci-
dions within the store; and on retail sites (e.g., Amazon, A
cz and Anti) that show different products based on
analysis of shoppers' web movements, previous buy-
ing history, and even location in a physical store (see
Turrow forthcoming). Long form television program-
ming (for example, news and entertainment series) have
so far not gotten involved in personalization. That may
be largely because of the difficulty of tailoring large bod-
ies of otherwise changing content in response to continua-
ously updated profiles of millions of audience members.
The first is possible. Comcast-owned Visible World is
one company that has the technology to do it, but ex-
ecutives believe the revenue to be gained from carrying
it out so far doesn't justify the high cost (Turrow 2012).
Publishing industry trends with rising processor speeds
may one day change their outlook. A likely personaliza-
tion step in the near future will be for video providers
to tailor programming guides based on what the pro-
vider of multiple programming channels—or multiple
video streams—knows about particular individuals and
households.

Many economic and technological considerations
suggest that personalization will become an increas-
ingly important element of media presentations in the
decades to come. Discourse within the trade indicates
marketers and publishers have strong competitive in-
terests in seeing the number of data points market-
ers gather or purchase about customers grow (Turrow
forthcoming). Concurrently, marketers have strong com-
petitive interests in building technologies that
can transform those data points into sophisticated
and cost-effective metrics tailored to attract specific
types of people and even specific situations. Inevitably,
marketers will accelerate their march to personalization,
as well. They will do it to attract the very individuals their
spenders want to persuade. Perhaps they will even work
with those spenders to create programming as well as
commercial messages to do that.

There are few writings on what it means for a soci-
ety when a dominant mode of industrialized public media
is personalized communication. Addressing the subject
requires exploring the history, sociology, and political
economy of media industries to understand the system,
chart its industrial logic, and map its possible trajectory.
The investigation also requires confronting issues of
surveillance, privacy, and social inequality. “Not all cu-
tomers are created equal,” Janain's report on personal-
ization in marketing asserts. The statement may well be
an epigram—and rationale—for moving toward critical
media research.