

Teaching with the Media

Traditional Media and Information Technologies

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Media

Uses of Information Technologies

In 1936, Shoghi Effendi predicted that “*A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity.*” Today we have the Internet and a range of new media for information and communications, uniting the world. As with any technology, they can be used for evil or for good.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 11 March 1936, p. 203)

Media cultivating passivity

Passivity is bred by the forces of society today. A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions. Even in many educational systems students are treated as though they were receptacles designed to receive information.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2010)

Internet and Social Media

The internet is a grievance machine, feeding users content that will enrage them and opinions that match their own. As tech geniuses devote all their brainpower to keeping people engaged, algorithms are getting smarter, and online life more exciting. Social media, integral to everyday life, provides instant entertainment, information, and connectivity. Social media are designed to get the dopamine pumping and keep us hooked, just like cocaine.

Social media addiction

Social media platforms revolve around improving our social standing and projecting it to others. That is one difference with real-world socialising, where overconfidence tends to be kept in check. However, its pervasive use has given rise to social media addiction, particularly among teenagers. This addiction is driven by a combination of psychological factors, such as low self-esteem and mental health issues, technological mechanisms like infinite scrolling and personalised notifications, and social influences, including peer pressure and exposure to idealised content.

Social media addiction

A survey of 14- to 17-year-olds found 40% spent at least six hours a day online. These platforms take the stimulus to socialise – recognition, inclusion, approval – and gamify it to an addictive level. Social media addiction is characterized by excessive and compulsive usage that affects daily functioning and overall well-being. It encompasses more than just spending an excessive amount of time online; it involves compulsively checking for updates, feeling anxious when offline, and suffering from negative impacts on real-life relationships and responsibilities. Social media addiction among teenagers ranges from 5% to 20%.

Young people are vulnerable

Young men may lack guidance, or self-esteem or other men on which to model themselves. There is an epidemic of fatherlessness and a lack of aspirational figures like coaches, youth workers and teachers. Without this, boys are driven on to the internet searching for direction, where they stumble on role models or influencers who are so compelling they can radicalise boys who are otherwise well looked after and have plenty to do. Thus the call to get young people away from their smartphones.

Mass Manipulation

At the collective level, political propaganda is more prevalent than ever in the age of digital revolution and social media. For over a century, the art of persuasion and mass manipulation has been constantly refined, to be used to manufacture consent or dissent. In the age of generative artificial intelligence, information is more than ever a power issue in international relations. Our brains have become the target of a new global information war.

Avoid the bad, build on the good

While we need to be aware of these negative dimensions of new information technologies and social media, we can ask how to protect ourselves from being trapped in their influence, while using them in positive ways to build a better world.

Teaching with Media

The new Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is enshrined in the Sacred Texts, the written Word. To share that with others also means using words, written or spoken, and other arts such as music and images. There are today many forms of media with which to communicate, and new information technologies are increasingly expanding their reach. Mastering the media is an important skill for teaching the Faith.

1912

The Palo Alto

FOR SALE ALSO THROUGH IN HENDERSON WITH THE PAID ADVERT
PAID AUTO CALIFORNIA, FRIDAY NOVEMBER 1, 1911.

Abdul Baha, the Bahai Prophet, Speaks at Stanford University

Abdul Baha, the Bahai Prophet, Speaks at
A great assembly of students and teachers crowd the auditorium to hear the Bahai Prophet
Persia expound the doctrine of a new day for Universal Brotherhood,
International Peace and Religious Unity

Words of Revelation

Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

The first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, LII)

The Limitation of Words

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made!

“Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, LXXXIX)

Words

No man of wisdom can demonstrate his knowledge save by means of words. This showeth the significance of the Word as is affirmed in all the Scriptures.... For it is through its potency and animating spirit that the people of the world have attained so eminent a position. Moreover words and utterances should be both impressive and penetrating. However, no word will be infused with these two qualities unless it be uttered wholly for the sake of God and with due regard unto the exigencies of the occasion and the people.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.171-172)

Words

Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.171-172)

Words

Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place.... ...one word may be likened unto fire, another unto light.... Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.171-172)

Promoting the Cause of God

*He that wisheth to promote the Cause of the one true God, let him promote it through his pen and tongue, rather than have recourse to sword or violence....
If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honored in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, CLIV)

The Word of God

The Books of Bahá'u'lláh number more than one hundred. Each one is an evident proof sufficient for mankind; each one from foundation to apex proclaims the essential unity of God and humanity, the love of God, the abolition of war and the divine standard of peace. Each one also inculcates divine morality, the manifestation of lordly graces—in every word a book of meanings. For the Word of God is collective wisdom, absolute knowledge and eternal truth.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p. 154, 29 May 1912)

The Word of God

The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh are many. The precepts and teachings they contain are universal, covering every subject. He has revealed scientific explanations ranging throughout all the realms of human inquiry and investigation—astronomy, biology, medical science, etc. He wrote lengthy Tablets upon civilization, sociology and government. Every subject is considered.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p, 155, 29 May 1912)

Necessary kind of writing

Today... there exist many kinds of writing. That which is most necessary and is assisted by divine confirmations is the propagation of the heavenly Call. It is this which energizes the world of existence. It is this which bestoweth life unto the dead souls, which refresheth the dried tree and ornamenteth it with leaves, blossoms and fruits.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Japan Will Turn Ablaze!, 15 October 1920, p.39)

Music

...although music is a material affair, yet its tremendous effect is spiritual, and its greatest attachment is to the realm of the spirit. If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies.

Music is an important means to the education and development of humanity, but the only true way is through the Teachings of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [Compilation of Compilations](#), II, p.77)

Misuse of the Media

The operation of transparency, accountability, freedom of the press and critical dialogue is... imbued with a spirit of partisanship that easily descends into the merciless invasion of personal privacy, the dissemination of calumny, the exaggeration of mistrust, and the misuse of the news media at the hands of vested interests.

(on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 18 July 2000)

Misuse of the Media

The reaction of those who attempt to protect themselves against such distortions of the system produces secretiveness, concealment of uncomfortable facts, and reciprocal misuse of the media – in all, a perpetuation of disharmony in the social fabric.

(on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 18 July 2000)

Proclamation of the Faith

Bolder measures designed to proclaim the verities of the Faith, its tenets, its claims and the purpose of its institutions, through the press and radio, through displays, exhibits and conferences, and through a wider dissemination of its literature..., as well as a more convincing presentation of its aims and teachings to the leaders of public opinion, should, moreover, be seriously and systematically undertaken....

(Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, no.160.8)

Broadcast “Bahá’í”

Every kind of broadcast, whether of passages from the Writings, or on topical subjects, or lectures, should be used. The people need to hear the word “Bahá’í” so that they can, if receptive, respond and seek the Cause out. The primary duty of the friends everywhere in the world is to let the people know that such a Revelation is in existence; their next duty is to teach it.

(letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 24 July 1943, *Compilation of Compilations*, II, p.282)

Divine spirit in art

He sincerely hopes that as the Cause grows and talented persons come under its banner, they will begin to produce in art the divine spirit that animates their soul. Every religion has brought with it some form of art – let us see what wonders this Cause is going to bring along. Such a glorious spirit should also give vent to a glorious art.

(letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 11 December 1931, *Compilation of Compilations*, I, p.7)

New Methods

The Bahá'ís should not always be the last to take up new and obviously excellent methods, but rather the first, as this agrees with the dynamic nature of the Faith which is not only progressive, but holds within itself the seeds of an entirely new culture and civilization.

(letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 May 1946, *Compilation of Compilations*, II, p.283)

Use of Speech

We return to the phenomenal characteristics of speech. Content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, timeliness are among the critical factors in determining the effects of speech for good or evil. Consequently, the friends need ever to be conscious of the significance of this activity which so distinguishes human beings from other forms of life, and they must exercise it judiciously. Their efforts at such discipline will give birth to an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race. Just as this discipline applies to the spoken word, it applies equally to the written word; and it profoundly affects the operation of the press.

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Messages 1986-2001*, p.115-116)

Role of the Press

The significance and role of the press in a new world system are conspicuous in the emphasis which the Order of Bahá'u'lláh places on accessibility to information at all levels of society. Shoghi Effendi tells us that Bahá'u'lláh makes “specific reference to ‘the swiftly appearing newspapers,’ describes them as ‘the mirror of the world’ and as ‘an amazing and potent phenomenon,’ and prescribes to all who are responsible for their production the duty to be sanctified from malice, passion and prejudice, to be just and fair-minded, to be painstaking in their inquiries, and ascertain all the facts in every situation.”

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Messages 1986-2001*, p.115-116)

Role of the Press

As to manner and style, Bahá'u'lláh has exhorted “authors among the friends” to “write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to caviling by the people.” And He issues a reminder: “We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither.”

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Messages 1986-2001*, p.115-116)

Role of the Press

...the code of conduct of the press must embrace the principles and objectives of consultation as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. Only in this way will the press be able to make its full contribution to the preservation of the rights of the people and become a powerful instrument in the consultative processes of society, and hence for the unity of the human race.

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Messages 1986-2001*, p.115-116)

Challenges for youth

...countless young people look to their societies and, aside from economic challenges and material hardships, they also see standards of basic decency waning and capacity for good-faith dialogue ebbing. They see leaders and institutions of all kinds discredited by corruption and inadequacy. They see notions of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, increasingly dismissed as irrelevant in favor of the pursuit of self-interest and the struggle for power. And they are convinced that no amount of material or technological advancement will make up for the absence of trustworthiness and honesty, generosity and camaraderie, commitment to truth and a sense of responsibility.

(Bahá'í International Community, In the Vanguard: The Role of Youth in an Ever-Advancing Global Society, 10 July 2024)

Digital Technologies

Digital technologies are evolving at a pace scarcely imagined even in recent years, opening vast possibilities but adding further uncertainty to a world already destabilized by gross inequalities, growing polarization, and social fragmentation.

(Bahá'í International Community, In the Vanguard: The Role of Youth in an Ever-Advancing Global Society, 10 July 2024)

Digital Technologies

Undoubtedly, technological innovation has been a source of many advancements, serving to amplify human intent and capabilities. Yet, like any tool, it can be deployed productively or destructively, depending on the ethical considerations underlying its design and use.... If technology is to be a means to enhance flourishing, it must extend capabilities in a manner reflecting essential human ideals and aspirations.

(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections of Our Values: Digital Technologies and a Just Transition, 8 February 2021)

Digital Technologies

Notwithstanding achievements of new technologies, various forms of social bias and inequity are often embedded in their design or application, which are unintentionally adopted by users. Decisions related to use and distribution are often left to a privileged few who may not foresee such consequences. In the case of digital technologies, this challenge is exacerbated as specific values and assumptions are engineered into products and adopted at a pace exceeding the capacity of even the most qualified legislatures to properly assess.

(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections of Our Values: Digital Technologies and a Just Transition, 8 February 2021)

Digital Technologies

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, where more digital technologies are adopted out of perceived or actual necessity, unforeseen consequences arise, no matter how well-intended a technological system or solution. Recognizing the power of technologies to open new opportunities and shape reality, an honest examination of the presumptions and norms underlying their creation and use is therefore critical.

(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections of Our Values: Digital Technologies and a Just Transition, 8 February 2021)

Digital Technologies

As has become increasingly clear in recent years, digital technologies are not implicitly neutral. Technological innovation, much like the prevalent development paradigm, is deeply influenced by materialistic underpinnings. Basic notions about progress are largely founded on a belief that the acquisition of goods will conduce to greater levels of wellbeing. Solutions are devised based on these assumptions and widely transplanted without considering social, ethical, and spiritual implications.

(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections of Our Values: Digital Technologies and a Just Transition, 8 February 2021)

Digital Technologies

Even when resulting technologies benefit society in one way, they can have the effect of perpetuating existing disparities or undermine other social goals. Divorced from an understanding of the needs of the users themselves, the unconscious adoption of technological tools and services could inadvertently result in communities losing touch with important elements of their cultural heritage.

(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections of Our Values: Digital Technologies and a Just Transition, 8 February 2021)

Digital Technologies

As digital tools are increasingly applied to all areas of individual and collective endeavor, the question then shifts from whether such technologies should be used, to how they can be appropriately and consciously conceived and applied.... Such a process would largely be informed by the experience of local communities rather than external market or ideological forces, diversity rather than uniformity, and a multiplicity of approaches rather than the imposition of dominant but extrinsic worldviews.

Digital Technologies

Humanity is being propelled to greater degrees of integration.... We have the tools, through digital technologies themselves as well as genuine consultation, to ensure a just transition. We have the capacity to allow those historically excluded to participate in critical questions about humanity's future. When all members of the human family are provided the opportunity to contribute to the betterment of the world, and the full range of human capabilities express themselves in charting a meaningful life beyond solely materialistic considerations, true prosperity becomes possible.

(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections of Our Values: Digital Technologies and a Just Transition, 8 February 2021)

Reaching the Masses

The time is now, lest opportunity be lost in the swiftly changing moods of a frenetic world.... There is an overarching reason: it is the pitiful plight of masses of humanity, suffering and in turmoil, hungering after righteousness, but “bereft of discernment to see God with their own eyes, or hear His melody with their own ears.” They must be fed. Vision must be restored where hope is lost, confidence built where doubt and confusion are rife.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 1988, *A Wider Horizon*, p.58)