Chapter 10
A New Research Agenda on Mass Communication, Social Informatics, and Children's Literature in US:
Implications for Researchers in Asia–Oceania Region

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of online environments presents challenges to researchers and scholars in various disciplines; an inter-disciplinary collaboration is needed to understand related societal phenomena in the digital age. The purpose of this chapter is to establish a research framework consisting of mass communication, social informatics, and children's literature regarding children and their racial perceptions. The uniqueness of this approach is to apply the findings of online readers' comments on a new story to a particular subject area, children's literature, in which the authors examine how societal issues are illustrated in popular books. Within this framework, the authors identify three research areas: social awareness through the communication process, social perception through the analysis of social informatics, and social adoption through illustrations in the children's books.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Internet-based information and communication technologies (ICT) has tremendous impact on news media outlets from reporting and editing to dissemination and polling. Amateur news contributors (e.g., CNN's iReports) can provide contents to news outlets, voice their reactions to published news stories (e.g., *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*' Comments) and point out errors in the mainstream news outlets (Gillespie, 2010; Lee & Ma, 2011; Livingstone, 2004; Van Dijck, 2009). Such changes bring alternative viewpoints and attention to newsworthy social issues and events. In the meantime, traditional news outlets have adopted those changes to secure their roles in the society, to engage with their audience, and to interact with the inputs from the audience (Livingstone, 2004). Furthermore, novel research approaches have emerged to study mass media and societal issues due to those changes on traditional news outlets. To that end, the purpose of this chapter is to describe a research framework that we developed to examine Americans' perceptions of race and "difference" in America.

Figure 1 represents our research framework. Traditionally, mass media practitioners investigate and disseminate societal issues in the news outlets. The emerging ICTs have changed this communication model and engage their audience via interactive readers' comments. The richness of readers' comments provides researchers with a brand new research field to understand social perceptions on societal issues. Various research methods have been employed to study public opinions and trends. The uniqueness of our study is to apply the findings of readers' comments on the CNN's new story (2010a) to a particular subject area, children's literature, in which we examine how societal issues were illustrated in popular books. Within this framework, we identify three research areas: social awareness through the communication process, social perception through the

analysis of social informatics, and social adoption through illustrations in the children's books.

The larger implication of this research is the establishment of a new approach to examining sociocultural phenomena within an increasingly diverse realm of information sources. By triangulating the results of three studies that, in their essence, examine the concept of "difference" through a variety of mediums, we have developed a clearer understanding of how the American population sees, understands, and communicates race. This type of holistic approach to developing theory about sociocultural phenomena has the potential to serve the needs of researchers in countries other than America who are studying societal issues particular to their own parts of the world.

BACKGROUND

The Handbook of New Media edited by Lievrouw and Livingstone in 2002 was a remarkable milestone regarding the then emerging research field of ICTs in the digital age. The first edition of this book consisted of six sections with 31 chapters: The Changing Social Landscape; Technology Design and Development; New Media and Organizing; Systems, Industries and Markets; Policy and Regulation; and Culture and New Media (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). In their introductory chapter, the editors urged that the social aspect of ICTs in the digital era was equally important as well as its technology aspect (pp. 1-14). The success of this *Handbook* led to an updated student edition of this *Handbook* in 2006. The 2006 edition consisted of three sections with 22 chapters: New Media, Culture and Society; Technology Systems, Design and Industries; and New Media, Institutions and Governance. The edition aims for the new technology-savvy generation of students with an emphasis on the historical, economic, social or behavioral issues of ICTs (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006, pp. 1-14).

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