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**Another Time, Another Place: Archival Media Content  
as Temporal Consciousness and Collective Memory**

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**Another Time, Another Place: Archival Media Content  
as Temporal Consciousness and Collective Memory**

by

**Terry Lynn Britt, B.A.**

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**Another Time, Another Place: Archival Media Content  
as Temporal Consciousness and Collective Memory**

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Internet-based video streaming services have arisen in the past decade not only to provide new ways of engaging with current media content, but also with media content of the past, including news archives, movies, and television shows. This ability to “dial up” the mediated past almost at will with a broadband Internet connection suggests new ways for viewers of such content to use it in constructing temporal consciousness, which refers to how someone experiences and perceives time; and temporal frameworks related to the online content. Likewise, online media archives can be used in the formation and preservation of collective memory. Utilizing a targeted focus group study of 18-30-year-olds and their reactions and memories triggered by viewing selected archival news and entertainment content found online, the study contained within this master’s thesis proposes to explore elements of online media archives that might assist viewers in building a type of mediated temporal consciousness – time awareness and structuring through the consumption of media content – as well as collective memory. Consideration of these possible effects may better define the social value of media archives and their accessibility to future generations of potential viewers. Additionally, qualitative investigation of these concepts can help us to understand more about the mind’s ability to

connect media content with personal experience and memory, as well as understand more about new media's sociological and psychological significance as a depository for archival content. Without a method of preserving and presenting archival content, especially pre-digital content on aging, decaying source materials, large periods of time and history represented through news and other media content may become irrevocably lost.

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## **Introduction**

As the screen suddenly changes from showing the latest episode of a soap opera to a display of a simple title card reading “News Bulletin,” the 16-year-old girl watches and listens intently, taken off guard by the interruption of the regular program. A reporter’s voice announces the breaking news from Dallas, Texas, about gunshots ringing out as President John F. Kennedy’s motorcade passed through the downtown streets of that city. An updated report comes in while the reporter is still on the air and it is now believed the President may have been severely wounded. The unexpected news bulletin closes with the promise of more updates, and the network transitions to a scheduled commercial for a brand of instant coffee.

The date of this shocking report is November 22, 1963. The 16-year-old, however, is not watching and listening to the broadcast on that date, but rather far into the future – 2015 – from that fateful day in American history. Having heard her grandmother talk about remembering where she was and what she was doing when the news networks announced that President Kennedy had been assassinated, the young girl searched the subject on the Internet and found the exact broadcasted news bulletin on YouTube.

Welcome to the world of media archives preserved and presented in digital formats on new media outlets. While the above narrative is hypothetical, the content involved is not. The initial breaking news bulletin as read by then-CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite is available on YouTube, and CBS’s online news website took a step further in November 2013 with a four-day long video livestream of its original 1963



coverage of the Kennedy assassination to commemorate the event's 50th anniversary (Cohen, 2013).

Take a casual browse through the vast digital halls of that ubiquitous online video service known as YouTube, and you can view segments, or in some cases whole programs, from just about every time and place within the almost 70-year history of commercial television broadcasting. News, entertainment, special events, and advertising appear in a type of audio-visual time machine that now exists through the Internet. While movies, television, and music dominate the content on YouTube, other bits of the past exist on a vast number of archive-dedicated websites and other new media services.

The instant ease with which you may jump backward in time to the 1970s, or just three days ago, stands in stark contrast to the sender-to-receiver paradigm that dominated news and entertainment media for nearly all of the 20th century. Essentially, if you failed to see a newspaper article in one issue, the chance to read it might never come again. If you wanted to watch a certain television program, you had better be at home in front of your TV set at the prescribed time. The arrival of the consumer-level home video recording market in the late 1970s eventually gave television viewers more flexibility in *when* they watched programming, but program availability still rested squarely with the broadcasters.

The arrival of public Internet access and the rise of digital media in the 1990s paved the way for media archive digitization methods that made it possible for companies and individuals alike to put collections of past content onto the World Wide Web. A casual look at some of that content on YouTube reveals possibly surprising, though not

necessarily viral, view counts and numbers of comments. Many of the posted videos featuring news reports originally broadcast prior to the year 2000 carry view counts in the thousands or tens of thousands. As of April 2015, Walter Cronkite's 1968 on-air report of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. drew more than a million views ("1968 King Assassination Report (CBS News)"). A 1969 newsreel compilation of European bodybuilding competitions, featuring a then-unknown Arnold Schwarzenegger, stands as the most popular video on one YouTube channel with more than 3.7 million views ("Arnold Schwarzenegger Wins Mr Universe," 1969). Alongside news reports of pivotal moments in history and videos of celebrities before they were celebrities, more obscure fare like local newscasts from the 1980s and television commercials for long-shuttered restaurants await the would-be new media time traveler.

With so much media content from the past now accessible almost anytime and anywhere, it is natural to wonder what value it might have to online viewers. Historical research value certainly might explain part of the appeal but doesn't cover archival media content being watched for entertainment purposes, such as older television shows and movies. Likewise nostalgia, defined as an influence that serves "to evoke through memory, music, and poetry the buried pain of all those longing for an unrecoverable past" (Sullivan, 2010, para. 3-4), would be a possible reason to re-engage with media content seen during one's youth. However, the online content includes numerous pieces originally produced decades before millennials, also known as the "Net Generation" (Tapscott, 2009, pp. 15-21) were born. Those younger users of new media archives would not have been able to reconstruct memory with the content.

Instead, the sheer range of archival content online has grown so vast in recent years that other factors must be considered, among them, comparative processes, memory reinforcement or reconstruction, and establishing a sense of historical or personal timelines through media. This leads to the idea of the temporal and spatial body of archival media content online as building blocks for time perception and as a vessel for collective memory across spans of time and generations of people. Several successive generations have grown up in a vastly mediated society – print, analog broadcast, and digital media all included – here in the United States and elsewhere. That fact yields the idea of exploring media content across time, and how that content provides the informational and sensorial material for viewers to identify, sort, and compare time periods.

Engaging in those processes leads to the construction of temporal consciousness, or an awareness of time and the different dimensions of time, as well as how we experience points or periods within time (Dainton, 2010, para. 1-3). Engaging with media content becomes a form of temporal consciousness as explained in the following example:

Watching a 120 minute action movie results in a two hour stream of auditory and visual experiences (along with accompanying thoughts and feelings), and this stream runs concurrently with the playing of the movie. Quite generally, our conscious states, irrespective of their kind or character, seem to occur in the same temporal framework as the events in the wider world – even if their precise timing is not easy to ascertain. (Dainton, 2010, para. 1)

Additionally, the building of memory through media content must be considered in exploring the reasons for archival content engagement or re-engagement. Your memory of particular events could be defined, at least in part, by mediated content about the events in question at the time with which it is associated. Brothman (2010) analyzes the significance of archives by likening them to gifts, stating, “These offerings comprise materials for the shaping and construction of individual, community, and social time—with all their attendant ethical, political and social ambiguities and complexities” (p. 181).

On a larger scale exists the concept of collective memory. As defined by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory shapes and determines memory as experienced by individuals belonging to a defined social group (1992, pp. 50-51). Family (p. 61) and religion (p. 84) are examples of social structures that influence and determine collective memory. Given the social functions of media, particularly for transmission of social heritage (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 322), this might include media archives as a social agent for creating collective memory. Considered in this manner, the existence of and accessibility to media archives online greatly influence the sustainability of collective memory across long periods of time. The media content, when preserved online, serves as an expression of collective memory of the associated time period.

As another social consideration, news and other media content are often consumed at home, which means other family members, including parents and possibly grandparents, are present. Specifically speaking about television archives, Philip Sewell, an assistant professor in Film and Media Studies at Washington University in St. Louis,

Mo, spoke in September 2014 about being surprised at the large enrollment for a graduate class he taught on 1950s and 1960s television shows. The most common reason students in that course gave for enrolling, Sewell said, was an interest in television programming that had been the mainstay of their parents' younger days (Panel session, "Looking Forward by Looking Back: The Role of Historical Inquiry in Current TV Studies," Sept. 11, 2014). The presence of archival media content online may likewise function as a social bridge across generations, giving young viewers a pathway to the news and entertainment content consumed by parents and their peers at an earlier time in life. Intergenerational conversation about television content usually falls under two categories: relation to reality and portrayal of behaviors (Messaris, 1983, p. 294). New media's presentation of television archives might create a third category, that of relation to time periods or events of the past. While informational archives have been in place for centuries, the idea of electronic storage and retrieval of information began just more than 40 years ago and evolved rapidly alongside related technological evolutions. Understanding where digital media archives stand now requires a review of that development from the beginning.

## **Social Dimensions of Media, Archives and Memory**

Establishing the development of digital, or electronic, media archives must start with an overview of the first such effort and the general theory and history of media archiving. Social functions of media and how those interrelate with human memory, both on individual and collective levels, provide a foundation for the justification of media archiving. Progressing to more recent theories and technological developments, we examine media presence as a framework for explaining temporal consciousness or temporal experience through online media archives, the rise of new media outlets like YouTube as a site for archival content, and ongoing efforts to preserve or reclaim archival media content from obscurity or oblivion.

### **The Significance of Electronic Archives**

In 1971, Michael Hart received a mainframe computer operator's account with 100 million dollars worth of computer time. The high value on the operating time stemmed from the world of mainframe computing at the time – this “gift” being tied to a Xerox Sigma Five mainframe computer at the University of Illinois' Material Research Labs, which was a very expensive machine to operate (Reagle, 2010, p. 29). Hart himself admitted his good fortune had to do with one of the mainframe operators being a best friend and a second being the best friend of his brother, and that it happened at “the time there was more computer time than people knew what to do with, and those operators were encouraged to do whatever they wanted with that fortune in 'spare time' in the hopes they would learn more for their job proficiency” (Hart, 1992, para. 2). Wanting to do something he felt would be of significant public value in the future, Hart came up

with the idea of creating electronic texts of books and important documents – starting with the Declaration of Independence – that could be accessed by anyone on the computer network. That idea eventually became known as Project Gutenberg and essentially birthed the concept of digital media archives (Hart, 1992, para. 4-5).

More than 40 years after Hart’s initial vision of electronic texts, anyone with access to an Internet connection has access not only to documents and books of the past, but also to music, movies, television programs, magazines, newspapers, and even computer software. To find ourselves confronted with a media paradigm in which the content of 1964 can be accessed as easily and instantaneously as the content of 2014 seems simultaneously fascinating and bewildering, but such is the current world of online media archives.

Websites and streaming media services like YouTube, Netflix, Spotify, and Google Scholar forge a substantially different reality from the exclusive grip on content that commercial media providers held for most of the twentieth century. Online media archives endow their audiences with flexibility as to when they receive archival media content as well as what they receive. This stands in stark contrast mass communication practices for much of the twentieth century, when newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and film distributors wielded the power to determine when audiences could see and/or hear media content. The digitization of current and archival media content, coupled with the temporal and spatial flexibility afforded audiences through broadband Internet connections, WiFi, and, more recently, mobile technology developments encased

in products like tablets and smartphones, have shifted power of time and content selection to those audiences.

.. These online media archives continue efforts that reach well back into the last century to provide a doorway into social and cultural history. Like libraries and museums, archives “fill long-established and specialized roles in the care of cultural materials” (Meraz, 1997, p. 1). Archives also function as historical identity, sometimes in conflict with hierarchical pressures, and mark a fundamental breakdown of the social, political and representational hierarchies that had previously characterized the writing of history” (Wood, 2010, p. 163). Staff and directors of the Internet Archive, a non-profit organization started in 1996 to preserve the then-burgeoning digital content on the Internet, state that all archives serve as an effective means for storage and preservation of information. Archives provide essential open access to educational materials and assist in constructing memory for civilizations through cultural artifacts (“About the Internet Archive,” 2001). However, side-by-side standing of past and present online creates an entirely new mediated reality for users of online content. Paul Ford, a computer programmer, addressed the online archive phenomenon by suggesting that people do not immerse themselves in past content, but treat it with equal awareness to present-day content (2014, p. 23).

Particularly within the last 10 years, the development of social media (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) has helped shaped the consumption of media online, as well as provided hitherto unprecedented levels of public access to archival media content.



Exploring the dramatic changes in these areas requires an understanding of social functions of media, evolution of media, and some of the qualities unique to the Internet. .

### **The Social Functions of Media**

Much of modern media theory concerns itself with the relationship between media and society, what the media does or what people believe it is supposed to do, and implications for audiences of media. Citing Harold Lasswell (1948/1960) and Charles Wright (1959), Severin and Tankard (2001) explicated four functions of the media: Surveillance, correlation, transmission of the social heritage, and, Wright's contribution to the list, entertainment. The latter two seem most useful in discussing media archives from the standpoint of transmitting information across time to succeeding generations of viewers. In transmitting social heritage, media can increase social cohesion through establishing common experience and provide a social identity, although critics charge that the media contribute to depersonalizing society by substituting themselves for true personal interaction (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 322).

In functioning as entertainment for society, media serve as a provider of content for leisure time and expose vast audiences to art, music, literature, and staged productions such as comedies and dramas (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 323). Archival media content expands upon this social function of media by preserving such creations to be viewed and enjoyed by both future audiences as well as those exposed to the content's original dissemination, and who at a later time wish to re-engage with the same content for second or subsequent occasions.

McQuail (2010) states that the media and its content do assist or substantiate social orders that control or influence individuals. Theories along this line of thought include mass society (McQuail, 2010, pp. 94-95), Marxist-influenced political-economic theory of media (pp. 95-97), and media functionalism (pp. 98-100). On the last of these, McQuail wrote, “Society is viewed as an ongoing system of linked working parts or subsystems, each making an essential contribution to continuity and order. The media can be seen as one of these systems” (p. 98).

In contrast to a focus upon media providers and content, McLuhan (2001) built some of his theories upon the evolution of media forms and saw the medium itself as being more important than its content, leading to his now-famous statement “The medium is the message” (p. 9). He continued by explaining that the medium, not its content, “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (p. 9). One example McLuhan gave that furthered his point involved a university – itself a social structure as an educational institution – experimenting with various media delivering the same information to students. McLuhan noted that, much to the surprise of some, students who received the information via television performed considerably better than those who received it by radio, personal lecture, and print (p. 339).

However, both authors seem to concur on one effect of modern media. While archives can be said to have always carried the purpose of connecting the past to the present and future, the development of digital storage and retrieval of archival content has substantially altered the temporal and spatial considerations of that purpose. To that point, McQuail described media as having a communicative role that “bridges” or

shortens actual physical space between places, and he added that the Internet has created “virtual space” filled with interconnections that are not restricted by geophysical distance.

In addition, McQuail noted a similar dissolution of previously constructed notions of time, stating, “Technologies of storage and access allow us to disregard the constraint of time on much communication behavior. All that is lacking is more time to do all this” (p. 98). Together, these effects led McQuail to state that media lead to delocalization (and detemporalization (a removal or decrease in emphasis of place and time identities, respectively)), both increasingly evident in the Internet-based technologies’ influence on communication (p. 99).

Harrison Rainie (Howard, 2004, "Foreword") looked at Internet usage data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project to determine a number of ways in which the Internet has affected society and how people use information found online. Rainie concluded that the survey project shows Internet use is “helping Americans to share and acquire knowledge, make important health care decisions, deepen and extend their social networks, access cultural material...and entertain themselves more vividly” (p. xii).

Caren Dessauer (Howard, 2004, "New media, Internet news, and the news habit") defined a number of differences in Internet-based news compared to news programming from traditional media (newspapers, radio, and television), among them, dynamic, rapidly updated content, user control of information choices, and interactivity (p. 123-124).

These same elements may be part of the draw of online media archives. The overall body of online archives seems to be growing and changing daily, users have greater control of

what archival content they wish to see as well as when they see it, and comment boxes and sharing “buttons” tied to social media platforms are routinely featured.

Although McLuhan, who died in 1980, did not live to see the Internet as it exists today or the instantaneous access to media archives it provides, he did provide some foresight to the changes that were likely to occur in this age of new media. Similar to the delocalization and detemporalization effects noted by McQuail, McLuhan, expounding upon his concept of media as extensions of the human body, wrote, “Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned” (2001, p. 3). In terms of the archival media content now available through the Internet, it seems McLuhan’s words stand prophetic, given the fact that television and radio content from 1964 is as instantly accessible online as television and radio content from 2014, and content from a foreign country can be found online as readily as content from one’s home nation.

### **Building Memory**

To reconstruct and refer to the past, we rely upon memory of sensorial experiences (Campbell, 2002, p. 177). This is especially true for media content. When we read about or hear news content, that visual or audial passing of information gives us a cognitive reference point to the event about which we have learned. Likewise, when people talk to each other or write something via social media about a television show, they are doing so by relying upon their memory of what they saw and thoughts that emerged from that memory content.

Archive accessibility remains crucial to public awareness of media content of the past and, subsequently, that content's capacity for becoming embedded as memory. This paper will examine two specific types of human memory: autobiographical memory and collective memory. Groninger and Groninger (1984) define autobiographical memory as "the memory for events or episodes from one's life" and which tends to involve "naturally occurring events that take place outside the laboratory" (p. 745). Conceivably, this could include mental and sensorial engagement with media content, everything from reading a book to watching a morning news broadcast to playing a video game. The need to establish autobiographical memory comes from "a need to structure one's past—to be able to view one's life as a coherent, rather than an unorganized, set of experiences" (Friedman, 2004, p. 601). Considered in this light, media content with which a person engages or interacts serves the function of associative building blocks for constructing an autobiographical memory and giving order to concepts of past time that person has experienced.

However, given that no person lives or consumes media content in an existential vacuum, there are other forces demanding consideration when looking at factors that help construct memory. Before becoming archival content, news, in particular, serves a documentary purpose at the time of its dissemination. That same content may acquire the role of constructing collective memory when viewed at some point in the future.

From a sociological standpoint, the seminal work of Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), published posthumously as *On Collective Memory*, establishes what he saw as the predominant role of social influences upon individual perceptions of reality and the

construction of memories. The work also explores the role of social institutions such as family and religion upon the content and continuity of collective memory. Halbwachs wrote that individual memory and historical perspective are dependent upon social frameworks, and noted that people “can to some extent relive this past,” but can do so only through the maintenance of contact with the collective memory of the social structure from which the memory is identified, and is thus under the control of that collective memory (1992, p. 43). Citing Halbwachs as expanding a concept first introduced by Emile Durkheim, Shahzad (2012) noted “He [Halbwachs] suggests that memories are constructed within social structures and institutions but does not explain how they are constructed within the same social group and then pass on from one generation to the next” (p. 379).

Foote (1990) also explored some of the challenges inherent within Halbwachs’ definition of collective memory, particularly as it pertains to communication being carried into the future. He also presented a second definition for collective memory in that “the term implies that many individuals and organizations act collectively to maintain records of the past, even if these records are shaped by the demands of contemporary life” (1990, p. 380). Foote considered one example of mediated communication aimed at multiple future generations – a warning system regarding the location of buried nuclear waste materials – and noted the problem of “the variability in the way different societies come to sustain important information” (p. 380).

Foote also described the ability of social collectives to purge or alter archival information, enacting a sort of collective forgetting, in juxtaposition to collective

memory, in cases such as the history of events and places involving violence and tragedy (p. 384). However, this does not stand confrontational to Halbwachs' views of memory; he expounded upon the reconstructed nature of memory and wrote, "But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had" (1992, p. 47).

Chalfen (1987) supported this notion of irregularity in interpretation of archival media. In his analysis of the functions and meanings behind home movies and photographs, Chalfen noted that meanings and interpretations vary not only among people within the same general temporal period, but also can vary across future temporal periods. "Nor should we assume that individual viewers will hold a fixed set of meanings through time," Chalfen wrote. "While dimensions of a particular interpretive strategy remain stable, details of meaning construction may change" (p. 122). Despite the presence of this interpretation factor, Chalfen affirmed the archival value of home photographs and videos as "intimately related to needs to create visual diaries which act as mnemonic devices" (p. 137).

Campbell (2002) also presented the idea of memories being reconstructions in the mind, and therefore impure in comparison to the original experience of an object or event— although he examines the subject from a philosophical approach and focuses on individual memory. "Memory images are not simple copies of past perceptions," Campbell wrote. "If they were, there would indeed be a puzzle about how a single memory-experience could simultaneously be a copy of two quite distinct past

perceptions” (2002, p. 188). Regarding memory reconstruction, Campbell also provided temporal classifications for sorting “memory demonstratives,” what he defines as perceptions made available by memory of events. These perceptions fall into three categories: episodic, repeated, and extended (p. 177). In the context of media archives, these temporal classifications can be useful in considering the relationship of reference points to memory, such as a single news event or program (episodic), a specific series of programming (repeated), or a definitive time period of programming, such as a particular season of a television show (extended).

Halbwachs and Foote both addressed the social influences and relationships of constructing memory, and how archival media – from old photographs to government documents – might be used to sustain a sense of collective memory. Chalfen and Campbell focused more on individual constructions of memory. Interestingly, all four authors note the potential inconsistencies and differences in memory compared to the original event, indicating that although archives may assist in constructing memory, they are typically incomplete or mutable in interpretation.

### **Transportation and Transformation**

Even if imperfect, archives still play a crucial role in connecting people to the past in both time and space. Television news cameras and reporters on location bring us to that location, giving us a greater sense of the place. The same holds true of time when looking at news archives. We get a greater sense not just of where we are being taken by the news report, but what it was like *then* – the past of that place.



The presence theory work of Matthew Lombard becomes an insightful tool for examining this aspect of archival content. Online media archives can function as a “presence portal,” to interpret Lombard and Ditton’s (1997) concept of presence as transportation, and its traffic flows bi-directionally. The authors divide presence as transportation into three types: “‘You are there,’ in which the user is transported to another place; ‘It is here,’ in which another place and the objects within it are transported to the user; and ‘We are together,’ in which two (or more) communicators are transported together to a place that they share.”

Of these concepts, the first two may be most integral to the experience of consuming (or re-consuming) archival media content via the Internet. Through assorted websites and online services, the archival media content essentially acts as the psychological transporter of both viewer and content. Levinson (1999) seemed to agree with this idea in stating that not only are viewers transported back to the time-space point of the media content’s origin, but also the preserved content itself is moved forward in time as well as being elevated into an art form. (1999, pp. 149-150). Certainly, the surviving silent films and old cinematic newsreel compilations are two examples of old media taking on the cloak of art. From the standpoint of the time at which these films were produced, the content has been pushed into the future. Likewise, viewers of these films today are taken by the content back to the time of production.

More recently, Koppel and Berntsen (2013) have presented another potential factor in the temporal transporting quality of archival media, that of the *youth bias*. The authors conducted two related studies involving questions of when the most important

public event in a person's lifetime might occur. Their findings pointed to a peak in responses that indicated the time of life between ages 11-30, and hence suggested the presence of a *youth bias*, which the authors defined as holding that "the most notable experiences of one's life, whether private or public, occur in young adulthood" (p. 422). If the consumption of media content influences memory, then this study may suggest a similar age-based bias toward the search and consumption of archival media content; in other words, a fondness for media content of young adulthood.

In transporting viewers, online media archives, it can be argued, also have transformed the content originally presented by older forms of media. Levinson interpreted McLuhan's writings on media evolution as presenting "a refined concept of 'replaced.'" In reference to what happens to older media content once a new medium ascends to the top of public favor. In the case of the current digital age and its plethora of online media, Levinson suggested that "the biggest contribution of the personal computer revolution and the Internet may be the light they shed on television as they render it...into an art form" (1999, p. 146).

Levinson also surmised that only the future incarnations of media will allow us to fully understand and appreciate the World Wide Web and the archived media content it now carries, much the way the Web has done with television, radio, and print media (1999, p. 146). Spagnolli, Lombard, and Gamberini (2009) gave a somewhat optimistic view of what the future might hold, noting that the evolution of communication technologies in uniting both real and mediated worlds and relations can be seen as enhancing or enriching human experience (p. 137).

Interestingly, media transformation has already occurred within new media. YouTube, which began its existence in 2005 as a simple video sharing website, has since evolved into the most popular online storehouse of past and present media content and the third-most visited website in the world ("A Brief History of YouTube," 2010). Containing video-based archives of everything from historical newscasts to classic automobile commercials, YouTube may be exemplary of how the Internet and its users have transformed archival media storage and use.

### **YouTube as Collective Media Archive**

Of all the Internet-based media archives available for public perusal, none may be as ubiquitous and far-reaching as YouTube, and perhaps no other website remains quite as constant in the public mindset – perhaps, in part, due to YouTube’s recent and ongoing controversies surrounding accusations by various media companies of copyright infringements by YouTube users, many of whom post or share copyrighted content such as television shows and music videos.

In recent years, several authors have examined the idea of YouTube as a grand-scale media archive, along with the attendant copyright conflicts. Examining the temporal and cultural range of Shakespearean theatrical performances that can be found on YouTube, Shohet (2010) remarked, “Moreover, the aggregation of past performances available on YouTube foster historical consciousness even when individual student performances do not,” and, citing Latour (1987) and his term “immutable mobiles,” added that YouTube clips are mobile in that “they render 1920 as readily at hand as 2007,” and immutable because “their content remains intact” (2010, p. 71).

Gehl (2009) makes a more definitive statement in proclaiming that YouTube is, in fact, an archive and not a peer-to-peer content sharing network (p. 45). Gehl wrote that examining the website/online service in this manner “helps explain the different terms of space and time in Internet video” (p. 45). This perspective seems in agreement with Levinson’s argument that new media has not replaced earlier forms, but cast a different light upon them.

Additionally, Gehl suggested that YouTube, in its archival function, separates media content from its original purpose. Using the television political commentary/comedy show *The Daily Show* as an example, Gehl argued that such content is disconnected from its original economic purpose when broadcast on television (selling air time to advertisers) and “It is a *potential* cultural memory stored in the memory banks of YouTube’s servers, and in capitalism, a *potential* new exchange-value, if used for commercial purposes” (p. 46). This potential for the content to be transformed into cultural memory concurs with Levinson’s view of media repurposing as well as aligns with the aforementioned concepts of collective memory of Halbwachs and Foote.

On the other hand, some scholars have argued that sites like YouTube demonstrate the old proverb, “The more things change, the more they remain the same.” Kim (2012) wrote that, indeed, YouTube transformed into an institutionalized carrier of content, past and present, and “evolved from an amateur user-generated content (UGC) medium to a professional broadcasting channel” (p. 54). However, Kim argued that rather than being a transformative medium with regard to content of older media, YouTube has simply copied many of the aspects of the older medium it was suggested it would replace,

television, and this mimicking includes “legalized distribution of broadcasting content and smooth links between content and commercials” (p. 54).

Whether considered as a new way of retrieving and viewing archival content or just as an old medium in a new wrapper, YouTube and websites or online services like it, it can be argued, have created a new dimension to the act of providing, retrieving, and viewing or listening to archival media content. Unlike the old paradigm of media provider control of program syndication and repeat broadcasts, new media outlets have enabled viewers with a broader choice of content, across wider spans of time and space, and far more individual control as to when the content is viewed.

### **The Battle to Preserve Content**

In order to fully understand the possible uses and effects of archival media for viewers relative to concepts like temporal consciousness and collective memory, consideration must also be given to the preservation and distribution of archival media content. A recent qualitative, in-depth interview based study with individuals who collect assorted archival media content, digitize it, and upload it to new media outlets reveals that they, at times, are providing archival content online for purposes of preserving the content while also increasing public awareness of the content (Britt, 2014, p. 15). Simultaneously, these self-appointed preservationists are oftentimes combating the effects of time upon the original source materials for the media content they collect, or possibly rescuing content before the physical source is destroyed by neglect or indifference of its original owner (Britt, 2014, pp. 22-23).

Lost archival content from its destruction, intentional or otherwise, has long been a problem in the film and television industries. David Pierce (1997) explained that numerous silent films perished completely during the twentieth century for a number of reasons, including the fact that “While newspapers or magazines were printed and sold by the thousands, relatively few projection prints were required for even the most popular silent films” (p. 5). Pierce also cites intentional destruction due to economic devaluation of silent films once sound-enhanced films began being produced, the rapidly decomposing and combustive nature of nitrate film stock, and owner indifference and neglect as major factors that contributed to the total disappearance of many silent film productions (p. 18-23).

Television archives have not fared much better across the years, largely owing to the intentional destruction of content for many decades in a process known as “wiping,” wherein television station personnel would erase or replace content on magnetic recording tapes in order to reuse the tapes for as long as possible. While this practice may have been an economic savings producer on the cost of new tapes, untold local news and other local or regional productions were “wiped” out of existence in the process. Karen Cariani (2011) documented the Association of Moving Image Archivists’ (AMIA) effort starting in 2001 to raise public awareness and counter the ongoing destruction of local television archives. Cariani, while seemingly sympathetic to the logistics issues of keeping and preserving sometimes-massive collections of television studio tapes, nonetheless emphasized the social and cultural importance of the content:

Much of our nation's cultural heritage has been captured by local television. From local news coverage to children's programming to arts and entertainment, local television provides a glimpse of our country's communities...The volume of materials created and therefore in existence from daily TV shows – particularly local news – was overwhelming to stations. From the stations' point of view, tossing it was often easier than saving it. However, much of twentieth-century culture has been documented on TV. As archivists, witnessing the destruction of these recordings of our history felt very wrong. (p. 139).

While noting at the conclusion of the AMIA task force's project in 2004 that economic factors would continue to play into the decision of whether to preserve local television content, Cariani also remarked that the element of time, in one sense, is actually assisting the preservation effort as many local television stations, nearing or reaching their fiftieth anniversary of existence in the past decade, have begun to accept the cultural and historical importance of local programming archives.

There is growing evidence that national media organizations also are beginning to see the purpose and value in cross-generational audience outreach of archival content through online channels as well. A recent concept-based paper published in *#ISOJ Journal* explores two newer instances where television-based or film-based news archives have been repackaged for public viewing through new media outlets (Britt, 2015). Utilizing the concept of presence as transportation (Lombard & Ditton, 1997, Concept Explication, para. 7-12), the case examples include the November 22-25, 2013, live streaming broadcast on CBSNews.com of the CBS network's breaking coverage and

aftermath of the President John F. Kennedy assassination exactly 50 years earlier on the same dates, and the YouTube channel of British Pathé – legacy archive of one of the world’s preeminent producers of cinematic newsreels for much of the twentieth century – now housing the archive’s entire collection of more than 85,000 news films in an online format accessible to the public (p. 116-122). Such case examples may engender interest by other media companies to utilize both analog and digital archival content in special presentations online or in regularly accessible content offerings through a video streaming service or app.



## **Presenting Old Media to Young Audiences**

In sum, media have long played a significant role within societies, helping to shape both public consciousness of events, opinions, and interpretation of events that unify to form social understanding of those events. , More than mere collections of documents, media archives play a part in helping people form memory both on individual and collective levels and give viewers a window, of sorts, into different temporal and spatial experiences of the past. , Currently YouTube, in particular, exemplifies the new media experience of engaging with archival content. Netflix, Hulu, and other streaming movie services add to the concept with offerings of classic movies and full seasons of classic television shows. On a more specific interest level, a number of individuals have created websites dedicated to media content from a particular time period and media market. One example is the website FuzzyMemories.tv, a site that preserves and presents television content from the 1960s-1980s in the Chicago area and is operated by a non-profit organization known as The Museum of Classic Chicago Television.

With so much of the mediated past now on display through the Internet, though, how do younger audiences react upon seeing such “long-ago” content? How might it help them construct a sense of the past and of the time period associated with the content? Can archival media assist in creating a bond with older generations and older family members? These questions tie in with the two concepts defined earlier: collective memory, which, as noted above, refers to the memory born of social pressures and influences and becoming a kind of “shared memory” of a given social institution (Halbwachs, 1992, pp. 50-51), and temporal consciousness refers to the way we perceive

and experience time through conscious stimuli (of which media content can be one) and memory (Dainton, 2010). Given these definitions, this study of archival media content and its wide availability through new media channels presents three research questions:

RQ 1: What are the responses of young adult viewers to online media archives?

RQ 1a: How do online media archives assist in constructing collective memory and temporal consciousness for viewers of that content?

RQ 2: How does access and viewing of archival media content online help foster a sense of bonding with family members of preceding generations?

## Research Methods

To assist in exploring possible answers to the previous research questions, a targeted focus group of people ages 18-30 gathered to view and discuss six online video clips. Focus groups provide qualitative information based on participants' experiences, which then lead to general conclusions that can be drawn from the discussion within the group or groups (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Asbury (1995), citing Morgan (1988), states that focus groups assist in exploring new research areas, topics, or newly developed questions within established research (p. 415). Most of the new media sites or services mentioned in this paper are no more than 10 years old as of 2015. Therefore, examining the concepts of temporal consciousness and collective memory through archival media content delivered by these online websites and services is a relatively new area of research.

To compare types of archival media content, three of the video clips selected featured news content while the other three were entertainment-based media clips, including one movie excerpt and two television series excerpts. The video clips, in order of showing to focus group participants, included (with dates of original release or broadcast in parentheses):

- *NBC Nightly News* report on the release of the first iPhone (2007)
- CBS News special report on the departure from the White House of resigned President Richard Nixon (1974)
- ESPN live report of the Loma Prieta earthquake that interrupted the World Series (1989)

- *Field of Dreams* “People will come” monologue (movie, 1989)
- *Dr. Who* “Is it always this dangerous?” excerpt from Season 1, Episode 1 (2005)
- Intro sequence to *The Muppet Show* Series 1 (1976)

These archival video excerpts were all located on YouTube and were selected as both a sample of archival content across multiple decades and for their general significance as either noteworthy news events or popular entertainment content at the time of the original dissemination or broadcast.

A call for volunteers to complete a short, pre-qualifying survey was distributed throughout the University of Texas at Austin main campus area via the university’s online calendar of events and via flyers posted at public notification points throughout the campus during a two-week period. A total of 21 individuals responded and completed the pre-qualifying survey. From that initial response, those who identified their age as 18-30 – a total of 15 respondents – were put into a random draw for invitations to participate in the focus group. Twelve invitations were distributed; of those seven

Participant	Session No.	Freq. of online viewing	Freq. of archival viewing
“Alicia”	1	Once per week	< once per month
“Brenda”	1	Daily	3-5 times per week
“Catherine”	1	3-5 times per week	Once per week
“Denise”	1	Daily	2-3 times per month
“Edward”	1	Daily	Once per week
“Faye”	2	3-5 times per week	2-3 times per month
“Grace”	*3	3-5 times per week	Once per month
*Rescheduled individually after unforeseen circumstance prevented attendance in Session No. 2			

Table 1: Focus group participants by pseudonym, session number, and frequency of both general online media viewing and of archival media viewing (referring to content originally distributed prior to 2000).

responded with willingness to meet for a focus group at the appointed time, date, and place. In order to develop a sufficient number of participants, a second focus group session was offered in order to accommodate schedule conflicts with some who were unable to attend the first session. However, in order to maintain the integrity of both sessions, the archival video excerpts remained the same for both sessions and were shown in the exact same order.

The targeted selection of 18-30 as an age group for this study was based on a desire to measure how familial influence of older siblings or parents might affect familiarity with content with which the subjects were unlikely to remember themselves and how a sense of temporal consciousness and collective memory might be constructed from such interaction. Of those who participated in the focus group, pre-qualifying survey answers revealed that all but one subject watched online video content three to five days or more per week. Viewing of online video content originally produced prior to the year 2000 varied from less than once per month to three to five days per week, with the majority viewing such content 2-3 times per month or once per week. Regarding the type of older online video content watched by participants in the focus group, movies and documentaries was the most common response, followed by television shows or series, and news content (multiple selections were allowed). The survey also revealed that

YouTube, iTunes, Netflix and Hulu were the most likely online video content services participants either used or had established an account.

Six females and one male made up the seven total participants in the two focus group sessions. Five participants attend the first session and one attended the second session; however, a second participant for the second session was prevented from attending by an unexpected traffic jam, and so a third session was conducted for that participant. The sessions were videotaped with consent of the participants and each participant was identified with a letter-designation card placed in front of them to preserve the individual's anonymity in the study. They are identified here by pseudonyms beginning with the letter corresponding to their place markers in the sessions.

## **Focus Group Findings**

The focus group participants began their respective sessions with the three archival news video clips, purposely arranged out of chronological order so as to test the participants' ability to approximate the year of origin of each of the clips. Before viewing each video clip, participants were handed a short answer sheet asking (1) What year do you think this content was originally broadcast or released?; (2) What elements in the content led you to your answer for the first question?; and (3) Have you ever seen this content or any portion of it prior to today?

Upon conclusion of each video clip, the participants were given as much time as needed to answer each of the three questions noted above. The answer sheets, all anonymous, were then collected and each participant, in turn, was asked a series of questions pertaining to their general thoughts and reactions to the video they had just seen, whether they were previously familiar with the subject matter of the video, whether they had engaged in any conversations or other social interactions with parents, other family members, or friends regarding the subject matter of the video, whether seeing the video in the focus group had generated interest in viewing more online content about the subject matter or related subjects, and whether they were likely to recommend the video content to others. After each participant had answered discussion questions, a time was provided for additional comments if any participants desired.

After a short break, the participants were then shown the three entertainment media clips, again shown out of chronological order. The same process with the answer sheets and discussion took place as with the news video clips. At the end of the video

presentations, participants were thanked for their time and involvement and provided verbal full disclosure regarding the study's purpose, including association of memory content with media content and association of media content with familial bonding through conversation or other interaction (e.g. watching news, movies, or television shows together). These two topics were not revealed before the beginning of each session to prevent preoccupation of each participant's thought processes toward specific memories or family members.

An analysis of the participants' answer sheets and video-recorded discussions revealed a number of visual and audial cues from the presented video clips that enabled them to construct a sense of the time of origin of each clip, with the news content proving easier to approximate in time of origin than the entertainment content. Participants divulged a number of specific memories involving family members and/or friends concerning some of the presented video clips or respective subject matter. Finally, interest in related online content seemed high after some of the video clips – even when participants were completely unfamiliar with the content shown – but non-existent or low for others.

### **Watching News from the Past**

An analysis of the collected answer sheets for the three news video clips shows subjects were able to construct at least a correct temporal sequence of the events depicted in the videos, despite seeing them in a scrambled order from first to third. The most recent video, the 2007 iPhone report, was shown first, followed by the 1974 live report of



Richard Nixon leaving the White House, and finally the 1989 ESPN live report following the initial earthquake in the San Francisco Bay area.

“Catherine” correctly estimated the year of the iPhone report, while all seven subjects managed to get within two years of the actual broadcast date and most answers were off by just one year. This level of accuracy stood in spite of the fact that no one in the focus group indicated they had ever seen the report prior to being shown it in the sessions. The subjects’ most common responses in terms of indicators that helped them mentally associate the approximate time period of the video included verbal cues of smartphones being a “new” concept, references to then-Apple CEO Steve Jobs, and references to the iPhone being a completely new concept to the cellular phone market. One subject referenced being taken by surprise at the thickness of the iPhone shown in the video compared to current iterations of the popular device.

As might be expected with the 18-30 age range of the focus group, the original iPhone report from 2007 spurred the strongest evidence among the three news video clips to archival media content assisting in construction and recollection of memory. From the answer sheets, one subject wrote, “I specifically remember knowing a technophile going crazy over wanting an iPhone my senior year of high school,” while another subject wrote of formulating the year of the report, “I used personal experience. I got an iPhone 3 around 2010 so I thought back a few years. I believe that reporter (NBC’s Brian Williams) was very popular at that time.”

The preceding quote exemplified several portions of discussion about the iPhone news report that indicated interaction with other family members, particularly parents,

regarding the subject matter. “Edward” also recalled an interaction with parents, saying, “I remember I wanted one and my parents said, ‘No.’” and that the iPhone and smartphone technology in general had been discussed at the time with other family members. “Brenda” gave very vivid descriptions of initial reactions in family discussions about the subject. “I didn’t get it at first because my parents basically said, ‘You’re not getting it because it costs too much money.’ It was such an improvement from the flip phones at the time and pretty advantageous because you have all these apps. When I finally did get one, I spent a whole day figuring out the configurations and what you could do with the phone.”

“Brenda” added, “My dad was definitely against them when they first came out. I’m really excited when new technology comes out and I feel I’ve got to try it. When he finally gave in, I said ‘Yes!’” “Alicia” spoke of how family discussions about the iPhone centered around a realization of societal constructions in popular fiction from earlier years: “We all joke around at how people talk about how this has been predicted in so many science fiction novels, human interaction being embedded in virtual reality, and then we felt like, ‘Oh my god, it’s begun,’ but I also remember nobody in my family really wanted one at the time.”

### **How news reminds us.**

Science-fiction premonitions aside, another interesting result illuminated by discussion following subjects’ viewing of the iPhone news video came from remembrance of “forgotten” aspects of the iPhone’s first release. A few subjects remarked that the video reminded them that the iPhone had been the first on the cell

phone marketplace to feature no physical buttons on the handset, as were commonly encountered on “flip” phones and “bar” phones of that time and preceding years.

”Grace” stated that siblings and friends at the time were “huge fans” of the iPod music device, but playing music on one’s phone stood a much more complicated process. “Me and my siblings wanted to have a phone that we definitely could listen to music on, too. That notion of something that could be a music device and a phone, iPhone really changed that,” “Grace” said.

The 2007 iPhone news report elicited comments based on personal experiences and memory derived from those experiences. In contrast, the two older news videos required focus group subjects to draw upon comparative elements about the videos in order to approximate the year in which they thought the event or the news report transpired. Answers for this question varied greatly with the Nixon White House departure video but most placed it somewhere in the 1970s with three subjects getting within two years of the actual event year of 1974. Year-of-event answers for the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake news report tended to be closer to correct than the Nixon video; with the exception of one self-admitted “random guess” of 1972, all others placed the earthquake event between 1985 to the mid-1990s, with three subjects getting within two years of the event date.

However, most striking about the comments during discussion on these two news videos is the way subjects drew upon visual and audial cues within the archival content, mentally comparing those to current news broadcasts in order to formulate the time period in which they believed the older events took place. These cues from the older new

video clips included clothing fashions worn by people in the videos, reporting styles and intonations and technical aspects like screen overlays or graphics. For instance, in the Nixon video, while several subjects did recognize Nixon and succeeding President Gerald Ford, most of the indicators as to the video's age came from subjects' recognition of lower quality video, the comparatively conservative clothing worn by people depicted in the video (one answer sheet included the comment "nobody wears dresses like that anymore; our society shows way more skin"), and several subjects noted the monotone quality of the news commentators on the video clip as hearkening back to a much earlier age in news reporting.

"Brenda" commented on the aged look of the video and the monotone quality of the commentator in the video (which was CBS Evening News anchor Walter Cronkite). "Just the imagery was very old and I was thinking about how video technology has improved a lot," "Brenda" said, later adding about the visual cue of the manner of dress of those in the video, "It was like they were going to a tea party." "Faye" spoke of the "different type of clothing" and that "definitely the quality of the video was my first indication it wasn't anything recent." While recognizing Nixon and attempting to affix the time of the video to his presidency, "Faye" also drew upon the tone of the commentator, stating, "He definitely sounded like a lot older gentleman, definitely more serious."

There were other aspects of the Nixon video content that drew comparisons to broadcast news styles with which the subjects were more familiar. "Denise" commented on the video generating thoughts about the Watergate scandal in terms of privacy issues

and comparing it to current controversies surrounding the National Security Agency (NSA) and invasion-of-privacy issues for American citizens. “Denise” also noted the monotone quality of the commentator in the video and its “non-judgmental” style, as well as a comparative statement about the rarity of live broadcasts of events in news reports of that age. “Grace”, a self-identified college student majoring in Government, made an interesting point of reference to the Nixon administration by bringing up its place in popular 1970s situation comedies like “All in the Family” and “Maude.” Such cross-media references seem especially noteworthy given that the age of the subject would preclude having watched such television productions in their temporal context (the time of the shows’ original broadcast runs with relation to references about then-current events), and instead being familiar with the shows’ content through their distribution in archival channels, such as season releases on DVD sets or online services like Netflix or Hulu.

Interestingly, the oldest content among the three news videos also stood as the only one in which any of the subjects recalled having seen at least a portion of it prior to the focus group session. Specifically, “Denise” and “Grace” both stated they remembered having seen either video footage or a still photograph of Nixon making his “peace sign” wave at the door of the helicopter that was preparing to take him away from the White House for the final time as a United States President. While somewhat iconic of Nixon and his presidency, the departing wave, it might be argued, could also be indicative of a selected fashion in which Nixon has been presented in history, whereas content in the two more recent news videos shown to focus group subjects have not – and

may never – reach such archetypal stature in historical accounts of those respective events.

Positioned approximately midway between the respective times of the first two news videos in the focus group, the 1989 ESPN live report on the Loma Prieta earthquake drew a number of comments regarding more visual cues that allowed subjects to construct its temporal position as sometime between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. As with the Nixon video, clothing fashions of people seen in the earthquake report video assisted subjects with temporal placement of the event.

“Brenda” spoke about the suit worn by the reporter broadcasting live from Candlestick Park as the earthquake interrupted the 1989 World Series, noting that the reporter’s attire stood in contrast to “more casual” attire seen in live remote broadcast reports in more recent years. One of the answer sheets noted 1980s-style clothing seen in the video, including “big waist pants, sunglasses, (and) faded jeans.” “Faye” also commented that the clothing of people seen in the video seemed “very ’80s, maybe early ’90s.”

As with the Nixon video, the technological aspects of the earthquake report again served as hints as to the approximate temporal location of the event being reported. Some of the focus group subjects spoke about the quickness of the report in relation to the exact time of the earthquake as being an indicator that the report took place somewhere between the first two news videos viewed by the group. “I thought it was pretty interesting that it had only occurred about 20 minutes before and they (ESPN) were already on it...It’s pretty interesting how quickly he (reporter) got a live report on TV,”

“Edward” said. “I thought it was interesting that he, at one point, thought the earthquake was going to start again while he was on the news presenting a report,” “Brenda” added.

“Faye” commented, “It’s a little old but the (video) quality is better than the previous (Nixon) video.” “Grace”, drawing back on memory of watching other news archives from the 1990s, said the earthquake report bore a similar look and style to news broadcasts of the early part of that decade. However, “Grace” spotted a more particular element about the video that led to an early 1990s context – the font used in displaying the time of the report as it was being delivered by the on-camera reporter. “I’ve seen that same font used in a number of news broadcasts from around that time,” “Grace” stated.

As with the iPhone news report, none of the subjects could remember having seen the earthquake report or any portion of it prior to being shown it in the focus group. However, a few of the subjects stated they knew about the event being reported in the archival video. “Denise” commented, “I had never heard of us this incident until probably 2010. When I did and realized how massive an event it was, it stunned me that I had never heard of it before so it was very interesting to me to see this footage.” “Alicia” spoke of an even more recent connection to the event, “I was just in San Francisco, so I knew there had been a big earthquake not that long ago because a friend there was telling me about it.” Although most subjects in the focus group realized the earthquake report had been broadcast from the site of a baseball game, only “Grace” correctly identified the fact that the earthquake had occurred during a World Series.

### **Generating interest, feeding curiosity**

Unlike the iPhone news report, the two older news clips did not produce memories of discussions with parents or other family members about the event in question. Of the Nixon video, “Edward” admitted to having parents “not really interested in politics,” and in general, the unfamiliarity with the older news events seemed to apply to subjects’ families as well. However, focus group discussion on the older news videos did reveal a general inclination to seek out more information concerning each event depicted and, in some cases, an interest in seeing related video content online.

In discussing the Nixon video, “Grace” said, “I want to go back and see reaction to (former President Bill) Clinton’s impeachment. I’ve never seen people’s reaction to it, just some commentary about it. I would also like to find a little more detail to how people reacted to Nixon’s (resignation).” “Catherine” and “Edward” both indicated they might be interested in seeking online articles or Wikipedia entries regarding Nixon and Watergate, while “Alicia” stated an interest in watching related videos to the Nixon era of United States politics.

The earthquake report generated interest in related online content for all but one of the subjects in the focus group. “Faye” explained, “I would be interested to watch some more videos about this. It’s interesting or it piques my interest a little more (compared to the Nixon or iPhone reports). I guess I’m interested in it just because the report is documenting fact, and even though I’m not a sports fan, I would like to watch other videos to see the impact it was having at the time.” “Catherine” commented, “The



reporter said it is the largest earthquake there since 1906, so I might be interested to go check on Google how frequently Americans had earthquakes.”

### **Entertainment Programs**

In contrast to the archival news videos, the movie and television clips shown to the focus group subjects revealed a more epochal and inexact notion of the time frames of the respective videos. This might be explained, in part, by the perpetuation of consumption of films and television shows by the public through syndication, home video releases, and, more recently, video streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu, making an estimation of the content’s original dissemination to the public more difficult to determine for all but the most avid fans of the movie or show in question. Regardless, estimations of the original release years for all three entertainment clips in this focus group study spanned about 20 years from 1980 to 2000 or 2002. In only one case for the *Field of Dreams* clip did a subject estimate within two years the year of the actual release. Compared to the more accurate range of time estimations for the news clips, it suggests that fiction-based media content becomes more difficult to place in a temporal framework when the viewer is unfamiliar with the content.

However, as with the news videos, there remained the constants of clothing fashion and technical quality of the video clips shown as factors in the subjects’ temporal placement of the content. The *Dr. Who* excerpt, in particular, was noted as having the type of video quality that would place it as more recent, as well as the characters in the excerpt sporting clothing styles that several subjects associated with the early 2000s.

Despite that, it is interesting to note that all subjects estimated the 2005 episode excerpt as no more recent than 2002, with most estimates being from 1992 forward.

**The younger days of film actors.**

Subjects' familiarity with the content varied among the three video clips shown, but only "Denise" stated having seen *Field of Dreams* prior to the focus group session. "Denise" stated in discussion, "I should watch this movie again. I wasn't really enchanted with it when I saw it and it kind of bothers me because the people I know that like it tend to connect it as a metaphor with their own faith in God. Something about that just irks me, doesn't quite feel right." This stood as the only instance among the focus group subjects of memory content directly tied to viewing of the selected clip.

Although others did not recognize the movie from which the excerpt was selected, a few subjects did recognize actors Kevin Costner and James Earl Jones and were able to make a temporal estimate of the film's release date or age based on the relatively youthful appearance of both actors in comparison to later films in which they appeared. "Grace" explained, "I love James Earl Jones, and he seems definitely much younger here along with Kevin Costner, who seemed as youthful as he was in his role with Whitney Houston in *The Bodyguard*, I can't remember exactly when that came out so I was trying to tie into the same time period. This seemed like it was a late '80s or early '90s film." "Faye", able to recognize Costner, also noted, "He's older now and he looks very young in this clip... With the digital quality of the clip, I thought it was more recent but then I looked at the character and I knew it was a long time ago."

Other subjects made reference to the mood music featured in the excerpt, which depicts the pivotal climax of the film's storyline, as somehow dating it as older. "Alicia" noted "a very particular kind of background music that is played during these speeches of inspiration" typical of older films and "Brenda" added, "The music gave it away that it was something old, nobody really plays music in movies like that anymore." "Edward" admitted being a little bemused by the clip, stating, "I didn't know if I should laugh or start taking notes." Three of the focus group subjects said they would be interested in seeing the film based on their reactions to the excerpt shown them. "He's (Ray Kinsella, portrayed by Costner) about to make a very important decision, so I'd like to find out what happens. It's that everyday life situation where you have to choose between two things and you're feeling stuck in the middle...decisions that affect you," "Faye" commented.

### **Television memories**

The two television show excerpts elicited comments and reactions demonstrating familiarity with and interest in the respective shows generated by viewing of the online excerpts. Among all videos shown in the focus group, the excerpt from *Dr. Who* occupied the position of being the most known content among the subjects regardless of whether a subject had watched any episodes of the series prior to participation in the focus group. "Catherine" admitted being a fan of the show, as was another family member, stating, "We have not seen this episode, but others... We used to watch it in 2009 or 2010 on a video sharing website."

Multiple other memory-related comments dominated the discussion following viewing of the excerpt. “Edward”, who admitted never having seen an episode of the show, still recalled conversations among friends who would recommend scenes or episodes to each other. “Faye” said recognition of the show from the excerpt came upon seeing the iconic blue telephone box, which is actually the time-traveling vehicle of the show’s protagonist The Doctor. “A couple of years back, we had a Halloween party and one of the girls dressed up as the telephone booth, so that definitely put it right in my face,” “Faye” recalled. “I do have several friends who really like the show. They’ve definitely talked about it a lot.” Once again, the social framework of friends created a collective memory in this instance.

One other interesting outcome of discussion regarding the *Dr. Who* excerpt is in how two subjects drew parallels of the show’s science-fiction/fantasy theme and production style to that of several 1990s-era television series, with *Hercules*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Charmed* being mentioned in particular, possibly suggesting associative memory effects can be triggered by online content.

*The Muppet Show* intro sequence fared the best of all the archival content excerpts in terms of familiarity to the focus group subjects. A majority of subjects commented having seen episodes of the television series, one of the Muppet-based movies, or had seen them in non-television contexts when they were younger. Although the particular intro sequence shown to the subjects was from the original first run of the television series in 1976, the excerpt, located on YouTube alongside the other excerpts, did carry a

Disney Channel watermark which likely affected subjects' temporal location of the show into later years.

Once again, this excerpt triggered specific memory content for subjects who had seen Muppet-themed television or movie productions. "Denise" remarked, "I have so much nostalgia for this that when they came out with the collector's edition, I felt like 'Oh, I have to have it!' It was funny to watch it at an older age because so many of the jokes were so dumb." "Grace" added, "That was my childhood. Disney Channel was great, just all these crazy shows." "Alicia", although self-admittedly not a fan of the Muppets, recounted seeing a younger sibling and younger cousins watching the television shows and movies.

"Brenda" recalled seeing Muppet characters in a theme park and noted, "It was good to see something here I was halfway familiar with. I think it's pretty cool that the Muppets are getting to be a classic because everybody of all generations is able to recognize it." "Faye" commented, "I did see them in movies and when they were referenced. When I was younger and a little chubbier, sometimes my family would call me Miss Piggy and I had Kermit the Frog stuff." "Catherine", although not familiar with the Muppets, did state they were very reminiscent of Sesame Street characters (in fact, another well-know, long-running television series by the late Jim Henson).

## **Responding, Remembering, and Bonding**

In most instances, each of the focus group participants offered at least general comments regarding their respective thoughts and reactions to each of the video clips viewed. Combined with the written answers they provided regarding what year they mentally placed the origin of each video clip and what elements within the clip led them to that temporal placement, the participants provided some valuable insight into the effects of archival media content upon new, young audiences. The aggregation of their responses allowed at least some basic conclusions to be reached when placed within the context of the aforementioned three research questions within this paper. A review of those questions and the focus group analysis findings are as follows:

### **The Past as New Territory**

RQ 1 asked “What are the responses of viewers to online media archives?” An analysis of the comments and discussion from the focus group suggests that viewers are likely to have far more to say about content with which they are familiar, either as news topics or in the case of movies or television shows. Familiarity with the topic or content also seems more likely to generate re-engagement with memories based on personal or social experiences with a particular topic or content presented through online media archives.

The study also gives at least partial support for the notion that viewing online archival content may encourage viewers to look for related online content in either video or text format. Although the Nixon and the earthquake news reports shown in the focus group were both of an age preceding the awareness of the focus group subjects, several

concluded that they might be interested in finding out more about those subjects through online sources. Among a few of the subjects, the *Field of Dreams* and the *Dr. Who* excerpts elicited the same curiosity to watch the content (or other episodes in a series) in their entirety.

Regarding the *Dr. Who* excerpt, “Denise” said seeing the clip during the focus group might compel trying one or two episodes, and also stated that another family member is a fan of *Dr. Who*. “Grace” concluded that watching the excerpt in the focus group would likely prompt further viewing of the series’ previous seasons or episodes within previous seasons through new media outlets. Comments such as these present an interesting example of temporal consciousness at work because, in this instance, the focus group participants potentially will use a part of the focus group proceedings as a memory reference that spurs interest in viewing certain media content. The specific time associated with the focus group, in which that media content was encountered, then becomes the temporal reference point.

The focus group itself might also transform participants’ ways of thinking about history presented through the lens of news media. “Alicia” shared a very comprehensive reflection on the Nixon video not only in a comparative manner to current-day news reports, but upon the idea of news archives as a representation of history:

This made me think about larger motivations for watching archived media. This was a lot more interesting (than the iPhone news video) simply because you see it as a moment in history; you see it as this is what creates how people understand things that have happened. I felt it was really different from what you would see

today because there is this voice commentary but not someone physically there. No opinion was offered on why Nixon was resigning, and it was told in a neutral kind of way, almost nostalgically with a reverence toward presidents that we really don't have anymore. The comment about Nixon's last look at the White House (from the departing helicopter) sounded a lot more sympathetic than a news channel that would attack the government today.

Considerations such as this might not be possible without the currently vast roster of archival news content available online. The ramifications of instantaneous access to so much archival content carries us to the next research question involved here.

### **Building Blocks for Time, Doorways to Memory**

RQ 1a asked "How do online media archives assist in constructing collective memory and temporal consciousness for viewers of that content?" Based on comments and discussion from the focus group participants, there appears to be evidence that, even without prior viewing of the content in question, viewers of online news content are able to build a general sense of temporal consciousness through certain qualities exhibited by the online content. This structuring of time and news events includes, but is not limited to, consideration of the content's technological aspects such as video resolution or the style and tone of the commentator or reporter, and clothing or fashions associated with a certain period of time as worn by people depicted in the news content.

This latter quality appeared as a constant thread throughout discussion from the focus group participants and was exemplified in one comment by "Grace" regarding the 1989 ESPN report on the Loma Prieta earthquake: "Grace" noted, "I was looking at the



appearance of people in the stands (at the stadium)...people tend to dress a certain way during certain periods of time and that was something else that tipped me off as to when this might have happened.” Such a comment in reaction to otherwise unknown archival media content (from the perspective of a viewer seeing it for the first time) suggests that some elements of archival media can both assist in constructing temporal consciousness and serve as an aspect of collective memory for the time period in question.

Where personal experience with news content or the news topic is present, memory content can significantly assist with temporal structures within the viewer’s mind; the iPhone report exemplified this concept best among the young adults featured in this study. The discussion that followed the iPhone news report further supported the idea that archival news media could at least spur recall of both individual and collective memory associated with the time period of the subject matter.

As “Denise” stated, “It takes me back to a specific memory and that’s how I can place what I think what year it came out in, because I was a senior in high school. People were going crazy over it (iPhone), especially this one person I really didn’t think should be going crazy over something that was so expensive.” This same subject, noting a philosophical position at the time of resistance to new technology, added that discussion with other family members about the topic could be summarized as “probably nothing more than making sure that my mom knew it was clear that I did not want one.” This participant’s comments showed how three social entities – education system, friends, and family – created a collective memory about the first iPhone.

The study also showed that viewers may use relational comparisons within a temporal framework to construct a sense of time through the online content, such as was seen in the *Field of Dreams* excerpt regarding the appearance and estimated ages of actors in that excerpt. This aspect also prevailed in comments after the iPhone news clip, which reminded several of the focus group participants that the first iPhone carried the distinction of being the first to use various apps for social media, music, photos, and other functions.

That news clip seemed to remind many of the focus group subjects of the relative ubiquity of such features and functions on “smartphones” in the cellular phone marketplace of 2015. “Grace” infused another summation based on memory in talking about the multipurpose character of the first generation of true “smartphones:” “As I was watching the video, I was thinking about when the iPhone first came out, just seeing how vast and how almost universal it is at this point, it was funny thinking it really wasn’t that long ago.” The comment indicates that a significant shift in technology can become preserved through media and carried forward in time as collective memory of that product or technology. Even when viewers have not previously engaged with the content, archival media may act as a trigger for awareness of the event or its subsequent impact and the memories associated with that point in time. As in the case of the iPhone news report, archival content may remind viewers of facts previously forgotten or rendered less important than current events in the passage of time.

Temporal placement, however, can be tricky sometimes. In the case of the video clip from *The Muppet Show*, some subjects did note the lower resolution of the excerpt

suggested that the intro sequence was from an older episode of the television show, but again, the Disney Channel watermark displayed in the show's later syndication likely kept any of the subjects from suspecting that the intro was from as far back as 1976. Discussion about this particular clip also suggested the possibility that collective memory through media content becomes transmitted from one generation to succeeding generations through associations with specific interests, such as children's programming. Most of the subjects stated they would not be interested in watching other Muppet videos online or seek out other information online about the Muppets, but several subjects did say they would recommend *The Muppet Show* or one of the Muppet-themed movies to young children.

This type of predecessor-based recommendation of media content suggests an inherent value in some archival content, regardless of its age, and assists in formulating collective memory for future generations. Even for those who had not seen the show prior to viewing the focus group excerpt, the apparent popularity and longevity of the Muppets through entertainment media enabled those subjects to affirm familiarity with the characters, further suggesting the cross-generational quality of archival media content as collective memory.

### **Bringing Together Family and Friends**

RQ 2 asked "How does access and viewing of archival media content online help foster a sense of bonding with older relatives?" Where content familiarity was present, in both archival news excerpts and entertainment media excerpts, the study shows at least partial support that the social influence and interaction of parents or older family

members can create a memory-based bonding effect that may be triggered by the viewing of archival media.

However, it was also found through the study that siblings of any age as well as friends play just as much of a significant role in the construction and perpetuation of collective memory regarding the online content. Even in cases where someone may not be familiar with the content, interactions with other people who do follow or discuss the content can create a general awareness of the content and, in some cases, may spur an individual to seek out that content or find more information regarding it.

This aspect seemed strongest in comments and discussion about the iPhone news report and the *Dr. Who* excerpt. A majority of the participants certified that social interactions with friends or other family members who are fans of the *Dr. Who* series prompted them to watch at least one episode, and in one instance, become a fan of the series as well. “Grace” waxed at length about personal memories of the series, including other family members’ influence in spreading the fandom of the show in the household:

This (excerpt) brought back a lot of memories. My siblings were so obsessed with this show and I refused to watch it at first because it was like scary or creepy to me. But I watched a few episodes and it’s definitely engaging. All my friends love this show and my parents are now watching the show because my siblings are so crazy about it.

While recommendations from other people regarding television shows have long been part of the social aspect of television, the difference in the new media era comes courtesy of the wider array of venues for viewing programs; it is no longer just the major

networks or even cable television networks that a person must turn to for recommended programs. Going one better, new media options like Netflix and Hulu offer the opportunity to see past episodes of a television series at any time, as long as that series sits among the offerings. This makes exploring archival media, in particular, more accessible and marks a significant shift from previous decades when television networks still largely dictated when you could see past episodes of a program.

Overall, comments by the focus group participants pointed to a connection between familiarity with the subject matter of archival content and an interest in viewing that content in full or seeking more information about it through online sources. The references to memories of conversations or interaction with parents, friends, or siblings around some of the media content used in the focus group (most notably the iPhone news report and the two television show excerpts) suggest that family and other social groups do utilize media content in forming a collective memory of that content or its associated time period. Focus group participants' recurring reliance upon technological comparisons of the video clips, speech qualities, and clothing fashions depicted in the videos suggest that these aspects provide the means with which to identify the approximate time period of archival content and also assimilate the content into memory.

While these summations achieve the goal of providing explorative information and qualitative analysis of young adults' reactions to online media archives, more research needs to be conducted to produce a more complete picture of the possible effects and uses of archival media. To start, the video clips presented to focus group participants in this study constitute a microscopic fraction of the total body of archival media content

available through online sources. Different content selections may produce different comments from study participants; for example, more widely known or more historically significant content might elicit different emotions or memories that could, in turn, affect comments and reactions.

The content of the video clips for this study – not obscure but not necessarily known by a vast percentage of the general population – was selected for the purpose of giving participants a moderate challenge in approximating the year of origin for each clip and thus examine how they might structure the past through media content. This study did feature a majority of female subjects; therefore, a continuation of the study or future studies of a similar nature are needed to properly assess possible gender differences in reactions to archival media content and ability to build temporal structures through consumption of archival media content, as well as call upon personal or collective memory for identification of the content. A more broadly distributed and/or detailed survey regarding online media viewing habits may also illuminate future scholarship on possible uses or effects of archival media content available through new media-based outlets. In addition, future research should look at other forms of online media archives, such as newspaper articles and radio broadcasts, to determine the extent of building temporal consciousness and collective memory possible through those formats.

## Conclusion

Prior to 1995, not many people could have imagined the changes to come in news, television, and movie viewing courtesy of Web 2.0/new media. While YouTube, Netflix and other online venues for archival news, film, and television programming content continue to grow and to offer more of the mediated past, there also exists concerns about the longevity of digital versions of archives. A 2015 BBC interview with Vint Cerf, a vice president with Google, revealed that Cerf is concerned of a coming “digital Dark Age” because of the impending obsolescence of hardware and software currently used to translate and display data – including both personal and professional media archives (Ghosh, 2015). In explaining his comment, Cerf noted:

I worry a great deal about that... You and I are experiencing things like this. Old formats of documents that we've created or presentations may not be readable by the latest version of the software because backwards compatibility is not always guaranteed. And so what can happen over time is that even if we accumulate vast archives of digital content, we may not actually know what it is. (para. 9-10)

Cerf's future fear becomes a particularly harrowing notion for current and future generations of news and entertainment content viewers, simply because the vast majority of the present-day content is natively digital. If steps are not taken to ensure that future technologies are or can be made to accept backward-compatible operating systems and data, then it is conceivable that large volumes of digitally-based media content could be rendered unreadable and therefore “lost.”

As comments from the focus group participants in this study and those included in the associated studies outlined above would indicate, such a calamity would be highly tragic on social, cultural, political, and personal levels. Even in cases where the focus group participants were not particularly enthralled or interested in some of the archival content viewed in the sessions, it can be argued they were at least made aware of its existence and therefore learned something from a mediated past that was unknown to them beforehand. As noted earlier, some archival content in the focus group sessions did, in fact, create interest in viewing that content or similar content in full, or at the very least learning more about the content or news topic through online sources.

Online media venues, including video streaming services and apps, have not only changed the way the Internet-connected public watches media content, but how they also reach back into the past – and, at times, the distant past. Digitizing archival content may not be a perfect or long-term solution to preserving content, but it is seen as an efficient method of getting the content to a public that otherwise might not have known of its existence. This, in turn, can generate more interest in the subject matter, whether news-related or purely entertainment.

New media's way of helping us engage with the past, though, is more than just an exercise in journalism or entertainment history. By presenting the content as audiences at the original time of broadcast saw it, new media gives new audiences a truer sense of the way news was written and reported, or the way television shows and movies were scripted and produced. Likewise, going back in time through media archives is more than just a joyride through "old" news and television shows. As comments from this



focus group indicated, the archival content provides a sense of people, places, and events that mattered (at least to the media, if not the general public) in a given point in time.

The comparisons between the past and the present that can be made through technological differences in the content, as well as through social and cultural constructs (e.g. language, mannerisms, clothing and fashions), provide the viewer with that sense of transportation to a different time and place.

David Lowenthal (1985) wrote about a different sort of “new media” in the 1980s –films, movies, and snapshots – that brought the past into sharper focus. However, he could apply the same words in explaining the public fascination in 2015 with online video versus its television-based ancestor: “The new media also make the past more compelling...viewers feel they participate in the past” (p. 367). Archives for news, television content, and movies are not a new concept; our unprecedented access to so much of the content is what has truly changed. Going forward, that feeling of having participated in the mediated past, and desiring to go back for a visit every now and then, may be stronger than ever.

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