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Forum: GC 5 - Communication & Information

Issue: Promoting the expression of linguistic diversity and cultural diversity in the media and the world information networks

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Introduction

Every human being is different because of his/her race, gender, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, language, culture, lifestyle and opinions. The strength and wisdom of a society lies not in trying to diminish these differences, but in embracing their harmonic coexistence. A society's social, financial and cultural situation is only enriched by variety and diversity. It was Mahatma Gandhi who said, "Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization." In a time when white supremacists rally against the freedom of African Americans or when an administration tries to ban Muslims from entering their country because of the unfactual belief that they are all terrorists; reaching unity in diversity truly is perhaps the most challenging task that the world faces.

In the modern age, media and world information networks play a role in people's lives more than ever before. Thus, the lack of linguistic and cultural diversity in the media and world information networks stands out as a major obstacle in the road towards unity in diversity. When a culture or language is not equally or fairly represented in the media, it goes towards the exclusion of that culture or language from the society and it creates an obstacle in the way of many people who are trying to reach information.

This issue is extremely difficult to tackle since many either continue to deny such an exclusion or cannot pinpoint who's responsibility is it to step up. Does the responsibility belong to the media that ignores cultural and linguistic diversity? Does it belong to local and federal governments and international governmental bodies who fail to successfully oversee the media? Or, since some may argue that the media only reflects the lack of diverse unity in society, does the responsibility belong to society itself?

Definition of Key Terms

Linguistic diversity: The coexistence of a variety of unique languages in a society

Cultural diversity: The coexistence of a variety of unique cultures in a society

Background Information

Ever since the founding and increased popularity of modern media and world information networks, the lack of diversity in these channels have become a serious topic of discussion and debate. While some have argued that encouraging diversity is nothing more than positive discrimination, many continue to believe that without fair representation of all parts of a society, media and information networks will stand in the way of unity and equality.



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Currently, the media industries of the United States, Canada and Australia are scrutinized for their mostly white and men-based newsrooms and network coverage. However similar situations can be observed around the world.

Timeline of Major Events

The World Summit on the Information Society was a two-phased UN-sponsored summit that took place in 2003 and 2005. The summit was on the issue of global information and communication, and took focus on cultural and linguistic diversity in world information networks. The summit was supported by UNESCO and was featured in their report.



Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization promotes “fruitful diversity of cultures” and has taken great importance in increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the media and world information networks. The organization believes that the dominance of certain languages and cultures in the media and information networks result in not only further exclusion of other languages and cultures, but also restrains many people from getting access to information. As a possible solution, they have assisted with the World Information Society Summit, have drafted a comprehensive report on the issue and have issued a universal declaration.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

UNESCO issued the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, in an attempt to encourage cultural diversity in societies around the world. The declaration stated cultural diversity as “necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature” and highlighted the fact that being diverse not only helps a nation’s economy, but also helps achieve a better society.

The CEO of Google, a company which is inarguably the largest global source of information, sent out an email on the importance of fighting against anti-diversity. The email stated the importance of “creating an inclusive environment for all”.

Possible Solutions

The topic of linguistic and cultural diversity is currently irrelevant to many people, not because they don’t care but simply because they are not aware. So, similar to most modern social issues, the first step towards promoting the expression of linguistic and cultural diversity in the media and world



information networks must be raising awareness on the issue. This can be done through advertisement campaigns, lectures, seminars, etc.

Especially in the age of social media, the best way to accomplish something is rallying people behind that cause. Once public awareness is raised, people could be encouraged to demonstrate their frustration towards lack of diversity through rallies, protests, boycotts, etc.

Furthermore, while raising public awareness and discourse are great steps towards solving this issue, legal steps must also be taken. An example might be to urge governments and parliaments to create, pass and implement laws requiring diversity in the media and world information networks.

Useful Links For Further Research

- *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in the Information Society*. UNESCO Publications for the World Summit on the Information Society, unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001329/132965e.pdf.
- *Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Europe: a Challenge for Educational Research and Practice*. European Educational Research Journal, 2002, journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/eerj.2002.1.1.3.
- Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. UNESCO Cultural Diversity Series, unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127162e.pdf.

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- Darkoh, Bonita. Diversity In Media: The Lack of Understanding. Huffington Post, 7 Oct. 2017, www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/bonita-darkoh/diversity-in-media-the-la_b_17405026.html.
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- Warren, Tom. “Read Google CEO's Email to Staff about Engineer's Inflammatory Memo.” The Verge, 8 Aug. 2017, www.theverge.com/2017/8/8/16111724/google-sundar-pichai-employee-memo-diversity.