

Bucking the Trend
by
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President Tressel, Provost Smith, Trustees, Faculty, Staff, and Administrators, Graduates, and Family and Friends of our Graduates. Graduates, congratulations on your accomplishments that we celebrate today. You've met many challenges to earn your degrees and, thanks to your success at YSU, you can look forward to the challenges ahead with confidence.

I begin with a glimpse of my early years.

I was born in 1943, the third of four children of a housewife and a steel worker, and I grew up in nearby Campbell. In the 1940s my family had a GE console radio and a rotary dial telephone. Our phone was on a "party line" that we shared with other Ohio Bell customers. Around 1950 we got a black and white Dumont television that gave us three stations. My favorite show was The Lone Ranger. When I was in the seventh grade, I got my first job - "paperboy." I carried copies of the Youngstown Vindicator in a sack around my neck to nearly every house in my neighborhood. One of the perks of this job was snatching an apple or a peach from the trees in my customers' backyards. I admit this now because the statute of limitations has passed and so have my customers.

Our culture has changed remarkably since I was a child. Let's focus on a few of these changes.

As TV spread across the nation to virtually every house and apartment, it had a side effect - a decline in reading. As the years passed, the internet, computers, cell phones, social media, and apps brought a further decline in reading. Here are eight signs of this decline:

*Since 2005, book borrowing and library visits by adults in the U.S. dropped by 30%;

*Since 1970, the share of high school seniors who read a book, newspaper, or magazine daily dropped from 60% to 16%;

*Since 2000, the share of Americans who read a book, newspaper, or magazine daily dropped from 30% to 20%;

*Since 1980, the share of U.S. adults who do not read a single book in a given year tripled, and last year 25% of U.S. adults did not read a single book;

*Since 1990, the daily circulation of U.S. newspapers dropped by 53%, from 62 million to 29 million;

*Since 2000, the annual advertising revenue of U.S. newspapers dropped by 71%, from \$49 billion to \$14 billion;

*Since 2000, more than 2,000 newspapers shut down, including the 150-year old Vindicator, and one-half of the reporters working for U.S. newspapers lost their jobs; and

*Since 1990, magazines in the U.S. have suffered huge declines in revenues and readership, causing hundreds to shut down and dozens to shift to digital format.

As interest in books, newspapers, and magazines declined, the popularity of cellphones and social media exploded. Today, 96% of Americans own a cellphone and more than 80% of all age groups in the U.S. use social media, and worldwide, 5.19 billion people own a cellphone and 3.8 billion use social media. Americans spend an average of 5 hours and 24 minutes a day on their cellphones, with Facebook in the lead with 64 ½ minutes and Instagram in second place with 48 minutes.

Like all inventions and innovations, social media is a mixed blessing. It brings benefits and harms.

One harm is that cellphones, the prime link to social media, are a safety hazard. The National Safety Council reports that distracted driving due to the use of cellphones caused 1,600,000 accidents last year and that one out of four accidents is now caused by texting and driving.

Another harm of social media is misinformation and propaganda. I'll cite three examples.

#1. Social media is used to sow division, hate, and violence. U.S. intelligence agencies and internet companies have confirmed that social media users are increasingly targets of conspiracy theories, rumors, exaggerations, myths, and lies, which originate in the U.S. and abroad, and which seek to shape beliefs and behavior. In this connection, investigations by law enforcement officials reveal that extremists who carried out attacks in the U.S. in recent months and years at religious sites, military bases, restaurants, stores, and on public transit, killing or injuring hundreds of people, visited hate-filled social media sites often before the attacks.

#2. A handful of celebrities use social media and TV to oppose the MMR vaccination for children on the grounds that it can cause autism. They cite a flawed and discredited study in England in 1998 as evidence, while ignoring dozens of studies covering hundreds of thousands of subjects in multiple countries, which have found no causal link between vaccination and autism. As a result, hundreds of thousands of parents across the nation refuse to vaccinate their children and the U.S. has gone from a stage where measles was declared eliminated in the

U.S. by the World Health Organization twenty years ago, to an outbreak of measles in 31 states last year; and

#3. Federal law requires the Food and Drug Administration to ensure that the products and treatments in conventional medicine are proven safe and effective before they are marketed but no such requirement applies to so-called alternative medicine. As a result, products used in alternative medicine, such as ginkgo, echinacea, fish oil, soy, ginseng, probiotics, and megavitamins, and treatments used in alternative medicine, such as homeopathy, aromatherapy, Reiki, spiritual healing, naturopathy, acupuncture, and chiropractic, are marketed on the internet, social media, TV, and radio without being proven safe and effective. Last year, 30% of Americans used alternative medicine at a cost of \$34 billion.

Despite these harms, the internet, cellphones, and social media are not going away. Nor should they. Properly used and regulated, they offer us many benefits. What we need today is not to disavow technology but to rediscover the value of reading books, newspapers, and magazines.

I grant that not all books, newspapers, and magazines are models of excellence. Not all books compare favorably with those by Jon Meacham, Susan Jacoby, David Holmes, Carol Tavris, and Neil deGrasse Tyson; not all newspapers compare favorably with the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, and the Chicago Tribune; and not all magazines compare favorably with Scientific American, The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Forbes, The Economist, and Time. Nevertheless, on balance, books, newspapers, and magazines provide scope, depth, nuance, and accuracy that social media and TV rarely match. They

broaden our understanding of the past, they inform us about current developments near and far, and they help us to understand the personal, national, and global problems that we face and that we need to solve. Thus, books, newspapers, and magazines help us to be informed and responsible.

So, today, graduates, I urge you to buck the trend. Make room for books, newspapers, and magazines in your lives. If you already do so, stay the course. If cost is an issue, turn to the public library. It offers you books in print, electronic, and audio formats, and dozens of newspapers and magazines, at no cost.

Also, consider joining or forming a book club if you're not already a member of one. A book club will prompt you to read and to form sound views through discussion and debate with others.

I close now with a caution. In our culture of desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Alexa, Siri, and ubiquitous cameras, privacy and secrecy are on life support. So, graduates, the words that you speak and write, the decisions that you make, and the actions that you take, even in private, may surface sooner or later, contrary to your wishes, with results that you will not welcome. If you doubt this, check with Garrison Keillor, Felicity Huffman, R. Kelly, Matt Lauer, Courtney Love, Chris Hansen, Jussie Smollett, Michael Avenatti, or the Houston Astros. As you move on to the next chapter in your lives, it is therefore prudent for you to assume that there are no secrets. On this point, graduates, I follow the lead of one of America's founders, Benjamin Franklin. Two and a half centuries ago, he wrote: "Three can keep a secret, if two of them are dead."

Thank you.