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Technology and Social Change

### Tetrads Essay

#### **Introduction:**

When considering what medium to choose I had to think of something that could fit all categories and the technology had to be somewhat recent. I landed on the apple watch. This device serves so many purposes and encompasses many different functions into one device able to fit on the wrist. I am enthralled by the apple watch. To think this is an everyday device used by many is very interesting. This singular device is a huge leap in the advancement of the technological world. It's hard to believe that the first apple watch was revealed in September of 2014 (Williams, 2015). In less than 10 years there has been a mass production of apple watches and many updates have been made. According to Wikipedia, "as of September 2021, there have been eight generations and eight series of apple watches". These are being produced almost at the speed of iphones. These devices are becoming more and more common to have and can function the same as your smartphone. People are doubling up on Apple devices that serve the same purpose. Is this redundant? That's for you to decide.

#### **Theory:**

Now for the reason for this paper. To know why this theory/subject is important you have to have background. First I will talk about Marshall McLuhan himself and then dig deeper into what the tetrads actually are. Marshall McLuhan was a scholar in the media ecology field. He was studying both communication and then culturally assessing said communication (Forsberg and Bennet, 2020). Overall McLuhan was an analytical thinker and had his own ideas with what

purpose media serves. There were multiple books he wrote that continued to be influential even after his passing. His most cited work would be *Understanding Media* (looking into the future of media), *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (analyzing the effects of mass media), and *The Medium is the Message* (the idea that media are extensions of man) (Chaparro-Domínguez and Repiso, 2020). McLuhan wanted to dig deeper into the effects on certain communications. Thus comes the tetrads. The tetrads were designed to analyze the effects of media through four categories; enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval, and reversal (Baías, 2015). With each category, there comes a question to answer. Enhancement: What is accelerated or is made possible by this medium? Obsolescence: What fell off due to this medium? Retrieval: what was repeated or recovered from this medium? Reversal: What is the unintended consequence of the medium? (Baías, 2015). I will analyze the apple watch and answer this series of questions throughout the paper.

### **Analysis:**

#### **Enhance:**

What is accelerated or is made possible by this medium? The apple watch has enhanced many things. However, I think the most important thing would be convenient communication. The apple watch now allows for phone calls, gps, text messaging and more. You can now do all of this on the go or in situations where a cell phone may not be applicable. If I am out hiking and do not want to carry my phone I can just leave it behind and use my apple watch in case of emergency. Another example would be if I am in a space where cell phones would be considered a distraction. If I need to quickly send a text I can do that from my watch. I do not need to grab the larger device and draw attention to it. The apple watch allows for convenient and discrete modes of communication. You can even communicate from a pool because most

apple watches are water resistant and have a feature to expel any water in the device. Apple watches series two through eight are water resistant up to 50 meters and the ultra is water resistant up to 100 meters (Dundas, 2022). You definitely would not be able to do that with a phone.

### **Retrieve:**

What was repeated or recovered from this medium? A feature on the apple watch that is often forgotten is the walkie talkie. In 2018 the walkie talkie feature was added to the apple watch series ( Gariffo, 2022). This is an element that is retrieved from this medium. This app allows for communication without a call or waiting for something to send. When you and a friend enable this on your watch it allows for quick communication. I myself have used this before and it is very reminiscent of my childhood. This feature is something that is unique to the apple watch and serves a fun yet useful purpose. Overall this feature is underrated and probably underused. However, it is still a past medium that is retrieved in this new device.

### **Obsolesce:**

What fell off due to this medium? With the development of the Apple watch, smartphones are becoming less of a priority. You can now leave your phone behind if it is inconvenient to carry. The apple watch can do almost every function the iphone can do. Apple watches are smaller and convenient. For example, if I am going on a run or a hike it is easier for me to rely on my apple watch rather than hold my phone in my hand the whole time. I do not think the iphone will ever go away but the apple watch is pushing it to the back burner. The watches are being modified and updated just as rapidly as the iphone. In 2022 there were 46.9 million apple watches (Laricchia, 2022) sold. It is only a matter of time before they start to be purchased just as much as a smartphone.

**Reversal:**

What is the unintended consequence of the medium? I would say the apple watch serves the purpose it was designed for. However, because these apple watches are convenient and discrete, this can lead to repercussions. Specifically, areas that may not allow phones now have concerns with the apple watch. Schools have banned this device because it causes distractions and sometimes cheating on exams. This situation is hard to control but when I was in high school you were not allowed to wear your watch on the day of an exam. For example, Penn State also does not allow students to wear any smart device of any kind during exams/tests/quizzes (Pursel, 2021). Even during advanced placement exams they now write in the direction that smart watches are not allowed and will be confiscated if you are seen using it. It is becoming a norm to now explicitly say smart watches in addition to phones when banning or not allowing technology in certain spaces.

**Evaluation:**

Overall I think the apple watch is a very useful product. It has many advantages when it comes to convenience. It is a smart phone that can fit on your wrist that allows you to communicate efficiently no matter the location or space you are in. I think this product is useful and I myself have one. However, I think it is just a way for Apple to keep making money. A smartphone can do everything this watch does and more. This product is solely for show. In my opinion it is a luxury item. Looking at the four elements of the tetrad this product is very good but it should not replace the cell phone. If people got just one or the other I would say the apple watch is a significant medium. But that is not the case and it could be seen as a waste of money to many people.

**Conclusion:**

After writing this paper I realized how easily influenced we all are by big corporations.. I was obsessed with my apple watch. I especially like it for the fitness tracker. However, after writing this paper I realized that every reason I like my apple watch is available on my iphone. Overall, yes the apple watch is convenient but probably not worth the four hundred dollars. Also that is just the standard version. The cellular and GPS option is a monthly payment for the whole time you have the watch. That is insane to me. In conclusion I think the apple watch is a redundant medium.

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