

# 2014-2015 Topics

## The Impact of Social Media

PP1

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, Second Life, wikis, blogging, tweeting - all of these words have entered our lives in the last few years. The impact of Web 2.0 and the rise of associated social media have changed our lives in many ways that we are only just beginning to understand.

Regimes have fallen because of the use of social media; careers can be jeopardized due to past and present social events posted on social media; people all over the world are able to collaborate in real time to work and to play. Some people think social media has a detrimental effect on people's social lives; others believe it is a new and exciting way of socializing and developing relationships.

How might social media continue to impact our lives? Who will monitor the truth and accuracy of social media? Will social media lead to increased social isolation or enhanced global collaboration? Is there a need for controls, monitoring, or restrictions on social media? Do the positives outweigh the detrimental effects? Does any government have the right to legislate the use of social media by its citizens?

## Processed Foods

PP2

An increased interest in food and health has occurred around the world. Many questions have been asked on this topic: Where are food products produced? How? Why? Who produces food products? How far have these products travelled? How long have they been stored? How is food tracked from "farm to fork"?

A huge number of food products are now chemically-enhanced and processed. Foods may be labeled as "natural flavors," but these do not necessarily come from the original product. Strawberry flavoring, for example, may have started out as a bacterial protein. Are preservatives safe? How might the addition of flavor enhancers, vitamins and minerals, phosphate additives, and sugar and fat substitutes affect our overall health? What are beneficial reasons for using processed foods? What processed foods should we avoid? Genetic engineering is still under study and remains controversial. Nanotechnology represents the latest high technology attempt to infiltrate our food supply. Do these new technologies pose serious new risks for human health?

## Propaganda

QP

Propaganda is communication aimed at influencing the attitude of a community toward some cause or position. Selective messages are used to produce an emotional rather than rational response from the audience. Common media for transmitting propaganda messages include news reports, government reports, historical revision, junk science, books, leaflets, movies, radio, television, and posters. Propaganda shares techniques with advertising and public relations.

With growing trends in communication, how will propaganda be spread in the future through digital media? How can wealth of individuals, groups, or countries advance a particular agenda? In a number of regional and global conflicts, including both World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Balkan Conflict, and more recently the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, propaganda has more typically referred to political or nationalist uses of these techniques. Examples of these techniques include the following: instilling panic, appealing to prejudice, creating a bandwagon, demonizing the enemy, stating half-truths, and providing a scapegoat. Propaganda usually exists on both sides of a conflict, but is often perceived as negative in nature. What are some positive examples of present-day propaganda? What are some negative examples of present-day propaganda?

## Enhancing Human Potential

AB

Through the use of performance enhancing drugs, personal trainers, speed-enhancing swimsuits, technologies for body and brain, people can enhance their potential in physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities. As time goes on, humans will be offered even more ways to enhance their potential in unprecedented ways: cybernetic body parts, memory-enhancing or erasing drugs, technologically advanced sports equipment, and/or humans/computer interfaces, etc. Will the definition of "human" change?

Many ethical issues surround these advances: Should sports people be able to enhance their performances in any way they like? Should parents be able to choose IQ or mood boosters such as drugs or brain implants for their children? What impacts might exist with the disparities between the "haves" and the "have-nots"? How far might the human brain and body be pushed? To what extent can we "perfect" the human body? What "enhancers" do we have presently? What are the dangers, as well as benefits, of powerful new technologies that might radically change the lives of human beings?