

Social Media – Social Responsibility by Stan Legarde

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Social media is a powerful communication tool that strongly influences the attitudes, thoughts and actions of a vast and diverse consumer public. Preferences and beliefs in products and ideas form camps of people who reasonably ought to know that differences enrich our dialogues and should not polarize our intentions. Not always the case. The recent political turmoil to the south of us (the 2020 United States Presidential Election) is indicative of that. The narrative sensationalized throughout (social) media that their election was rigged is a lie and resulted in a violent takeover of the Capitol building. The power of the message and transmission is a dynamic process that does have dire consequences, intended or not.

Canada does not exactly endure the same problem as its' southern neighbor but indeed have admitted that it has an 'Indian problem'. The racial violence that befalls Indigenous peoples in Canada is bolstered by false and inaccurate portrayals of First Nation citizens in our society and culture, that we do not pay taxes, are entitled, illegally protest and are above the law, which is misinformation. This inaccuracy confirms some people's biases while factual and true anecdotal print is ready and available. Our ways of life, beliefs and practices reflect our worldview and psyche of which is based on helping, harmony, kindness and respect.

The COVID-19 pandemic in marginalized communities has exposed the 'digital divide' (lack of internet services), inequities in our social institutions and systems while illuminating the privilege enjoyed by some in the face of human misery. The pandemic created a wider disparity in parenting, the brunt of the work going to women/them. The City of Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay is committed to dialogue and addressing assumptions in the ethno-cultural diverse Northwestern Ontario. Racial, gender, generational, family, workforce diversity, among other intersectionalities, are represented in Thunder Bay and presents an opportunity for a truly and strongly unified racial community. It is distinct honor to write for *One City, Many Voices* of which is now celebrating 10 years of inspiring contributions.

With unbounded freedom of speech and the means to disseminate your message with unlimited access to information comes the social responsibility to respect common sense laws, decency and morality. Advocacy and demonstration will counter the dark elements of society in the media generally and the internet specifically. It is also important to recognize the desensitizing effects of internet over-exposure to critical social problems such as missing people, human trafficking, the opioid crisis and especially the testimony of abuse by survivors and the discovery of unmarked graves of thousands of students at all residential, industrial and boarding schools across Canada and the United States. Responsible use of our technology and constant vigilance to harm reduction and informed knowledge will assist our allies while welcoming those who are curious for change.

The media has always been as influential and informative as it is today but the speed and reach of information was less immense. Today, inconspicuous consumerism and custom-made personae via social media has commodified our existence to the point of valuing the quantity of “likes” over quality and honesty of content. Unscrupulous mainstream media outlets who perpetuate stereotypes, lies and unconscionable drivel must be kept in check. Social media requires social responsibility.

Stan Legarde is a member of Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinabek Nation. He is father of four beautiful young citizens of our community. Alumni of Lakehead University Indigenous Learning program, he is a lifelong resident of Thunder Bay and is employed in the field of employment and training. Miigwetch!