

What are the features of new media?

Media



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Introduction

The onset of globalisation gave rise to the internationalisation of the productive forces of the world's economy due to technological advancement and the invention of new digital technologies (Friedman, 2005: 45). This work analyses the range of factors that depict the new media as a phenomenon which goes beyond the technological sphere by looking at the ways in which it enables the emergence of more creative modes of production (Florida, 2002: 44; Himanen, 2001: 76). In this context, there will be an exploration of the ways in which the internet allows individuals to explore and recreate their own identities through the establishment of 'virtual communities' (Webster in Armitage and Roberts (eds.), 2002: 35; Rheingold, 1993: 23). This essay will then concentrate on the impact of the new media on the evolution of democratic politics, especially as it relates to human rights (Castells, 2001: 70).

The impact of the internet in the creation of the 'New Economy'

It could be argued that the internet has deeply changed the way the mode of production in the globalised economy, creating value across many geographical locales at the push of a button. Some authors have looked at the ways in which modern globalised economies have created economic growth through the idea of a 'creative economy', transforming their production base according to the requirements of the information age. As a result of that, countries like Taiwan and Singapore, knowledge-driven economies par excellence, have managed to achieve industrialised country status (Florida, 2002: 101). The concept of a 'creative economy' can be

defined according to a criterion that exposes the central role of the creative professions and the physical as well educational infrastructure that supports it. The 'creative class', based on the ordering principles of diversity, meritocracy and individuality, is the driving force behind the 'creative economy'. By their creative endeavours, the 'creative class' contributes value economically and also mobilise as social groups who share a common identity based on their professional pursuits (Florida, 2002: 68). At the same time, it has been posited that information-driven societies operate, to a significant extent, according to the 'hacker work ethic', in which the Protestant tendency for hard work is intertwined with the willingness of individuals to 'realise their passions', elevating them as the primary drivers of their economic endeavours (Himanen, 2001: 18). Furthermore, the rise of the new media as a factor to be reckoned with in the reordering of the mode of production has led to configuration of a 'culture of speed', which affects the production-consumption symbiosis. Consequently, the New Economy is driven by the need to inject speed into the productive forces in order to defeat the threat of obsolescence (Himanen, 2001: 22). From this perspective, it is possible to state that time has been commoditised to the extent that it blurred the boundaries between life and work (Florida, 2002: 150).

Another interesting facet of the emergence of the new media is the development of 'virtual communities' which revolve around an identity-based criterion. The postmodern era is characterised by an increase in a spectrum of uncertainty and ambiguity, which stems from the loosening of strict social categorisations (Bauman, 2006: 94). The process of adaptation to the

new environment entails the realisation that it is not possible to control the risks that threaten the cohesion of society. In the postmodern era, traditional institutions like family, political ideologies and religion fail to shield individuals from societal risks (Beck, 2006: 34). From this standpoint, it might be posited that 'virtual communities' provide with a measure of certainty by enabling individuals to recreate their identities by interacting with other people in a seamless and pervasive manner. Moreover, the emergence of 'virtual communities' have been responsible for the re-establishing a sense of community and civic duty (Rheingold, 1994: 49). It could be argued that the rise of 'virtual communities' also allow individuals to commoditise certain parts of their identity. This is seen in the way that unconventional forms of artistic expression have gained notoriety due to the onset of globalisation (Webster in Armitage and Roberts (eds.), 2002: 37). The weakening of the link between cultural habits and geography is one of the ways in which globalisation consolidates itself as a worldwide phenomenon, as seen in the waves of economic migrants deploying themselves from the Third World to the First (Hopper, 2007: 50). In addition, the phenomenon of globalisation has spawned the rise of new digital technologies that revolutionised the concept of culture, hence become an instrument tool for the recreation of collective and individual identities (Papastergiadis, 2000: 121). From this perspective, it is possible to state that the internet and its derivative forms of technological reproduction have had a significant impact on the consolidation of the 'New Economy'.

The impact of the new media on democratic politics

The advent of the internet has increased the scope for participatory involvement, changing the variables that are part and parcel of the democratic process. The internet facilitates the reality of immediate, fast and comprehensive access to a multiplicity of images from around the world in an unfiltered manner. The worldwide web ushers in the possibility of fresh, unhindered and frank dialogues in regard to the issues that affect the democratic process (Fang, 1997: 19). Moreover, it allows internet users to adopt a proactive stance as political actors through online protest and increased involvement, as well as building a growing awareness in the public mind. Consequently, there is greater pressure on political entities to act in a transparent way, and in a manner which is conducive to the upholding of the democratic wishes of the public (Giacomello, 2005: 90). The worldwide reach of the internet puts pressure on states to reconcile diplomatic commitments with the prevailing views of the public. This new situation regarding social media requires an increased level of political transparency and a shift of priorities from political/economical bargaining towards the protection of human rights (Deibert, 1997: 70).

For example, the internet has brought to attention of the world the case of Joseph Kony, the Ugandan warlord who recruited child soldiers for his paramilitary organisation. Kony's case became notorious around the world thanks to the global level of awareness raised by committed world citizens through the internet and social media platforms. The new media propagated by the internet provides individuals with an effective outlet to voice grievances and raise relevant political issues (Rheingold, 1993: 58). At the same time, the internet has enabled national governments to become more

responsive to the needs of the publics through the use of technology, using technology in order to modernise information flow and operability. 'E-government' has been branded as an instrument which profoundly alters the interaction between government and the citizenry, albeit in a non-inclusive way, since the publics are left outside of the decision-making process (Flew, 2002: 188). At the same time, the dissemination of the new media have provided individuals with the opportunity to achieve more effective ways of political organisation, overcoming geographical and ideological constraints (Lance Bennett in Couldry, N. and James Curran (eds.), 2003: 20).

Nevertheless, there is also a growing scepticism in regard to the role of the internet and social media in regard to the deployment of political discourse. Some authors have rejected the idea that the internet and social media engender higher levels of political engagement amongst the masses. It has been stated that the feeling of empowerment granted through use of the internet is actually a mirage, in which people feel empowered but actually have very little influence on the shape of political events (Morozov, 2011: 49). In many cases, those who seek to engage politically on the internet do so for narcissistic reasons. Therefore, the resulting nature of that engagement is often shallow in both content and reach (Castells, 2001: 77). In spite of the doubts cast on the real impact of the internet and the new media on the possibility of a revamped notion of political organisation, it has been noted that technology is one of the main drivers behind the process of homogenisation and interdependence (Webster in Webster (ed.), 2001: 15). This has significant implications for the spread of new forms of political organisation, based, in many cases, on identity, ethnic and religious issues which affect members of particular segments of a given society. From this

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standpoint, it is possible to argue that the rise of the new media has had a significant impact on the democratic process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that the significance of the new media is intimately related to the manner in which it gave rise to new modes of economic production, driven forward by the emergence of a 'creative class' (Florida, 2002: 69). The onset of the information age has changed the foundations of the economic base in many geographical locales. Countries like Singapore and Taiwan have become industrialised economies thanks to the adoption of policies that were conducive to the creation of a 'knowledge economy'. In addition, creative forms of value-generation have facilitated the rise of 'virtual communities' across the world, which enable individuals to express and commoditise their diversity (Rheingold, 1993: 23). At the same time, the spread of new media facilitates a profound transformation of the way in which citizens engage in the democratic process, enabling the public to achieve new forms of political organisation (Lance Bennett in Couldry, N. and James Curran (eds.), 2003: 20). For all the reasons cited above, it may be argued that the new media have aroused a great deal of interest amongst sociologists because of the manner in which it revolutionises the way people organise themselves economically and politically.

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