

Impact of the internet on political and social change



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Placing the rise of the World-Wide Web in its historical context, assess the extent to which the Internet has been a force for positive social or political change.

Word count: 996 words

This essay deals with the extent to which the rise of the internet has been a force for positive social or political change when placed in its historical context. Considering the factors that have been influential on social change, it will then go on to assess the extent to which there has been an impact on political change. In addition to this, it will outline the counter arguments that oppose the positive development of the of the world-wide web, and assess the extent to which positive social and political change has been established. Then it will draw conclusions to evaluate the true extent to which the rise of the world-wide web has been a force for positive social and political change or to what extent the process has been hindered.

Sir Timothy John Berners-Lee is a British computer scientist who is credited with writing, at the time, his own private program for storing information that went on to form the main structure of the World Wide Web. As the source (“ Tim Berners-Lee, 2012 “) reads “ in 1989, he proposed a global hypertext project, to be known as the World Wide Web; it was to be designed to allow people to collaborate by combining their knowledge in a web of hypertext documents. He wrote the first Web server and the first client, a hypertext browser-editor” and “ advocated to ensure that CERN would agree to make the underlying code available on a royalty-free basis, for ever”.

Two of the most significant impacts that the world-wide web has had in terms of being a force for social change is in the form of connections and communications. These networks are not a tool for concealment of identities, but alternatively, exhibition of a real person. " There is a close connection between virtual networks and networks in society, meaning sociability is easily adaptable between reality and virtuality". (Castells, 1997)

As Tyler (2002, pp. 196) writes " the internet allows people to more easily work from their home, to form and sustain friendships, romantic attachments and to manage bank accounts. They are also essential in enhancing initiatives to promote political and social-issue-based discussions with others in their communities from home, and to pursue other social connections". Academics have been hugely influential in providing evidence that the world wide web indeed enhances this sociability (Castells, 1997), (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Academic research into this has presented a positive correlation between the continued use of the internet with indicators of personal happiness.

Another impact that the rise of the world-wide web has had on social change is that it has increased the ability for all sized businesses to advertise. This means that regardless of its size every business can still play a role in shaping society whether that's by making us aspire to be something or making us want something. (Kumar, V., Gupta, S. 2016, pp. 302) reference Jaishri and Shruti (2006) by stating, " Digital advertising has an ability to move markets and minds, products and perceptions. It builds a relationship between customers and brands".

The world-wide web has also developed into a place where political change has occurred. As Kenski, K. and Stroud, N. J. (2006, pp. 174) identified, results they obtained from the National Annenberg Election Survey, studying the relationships of access online and relative exposure to information surrounding presidential campaigns and political value and engagement. “ Political efficacy is a determinant of political behaviour-without feelings of competency and beliefs that one’s actions are consequential; one has little incentive to participate in politics”. (Kenski, K. and Stroud, N. J. 2006, pp. 174)

During the American presidential election, the social media site “ Twitter” was used frequently by the two main candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. They shaped the perceptions of the people of America via the use of tweets against the other party to obtain popularity using powerful rhetoric. As (Graham et al., 2013, pp. 694-695) writes “ politicians who use Twitter regularly tap into the intimacy Twitter fosters.” Additionally, social network sites develop “ reciprocal relationships” (Graham, 2013) due to engagement through public input on political dilemmas. The rise of freedom and independence, has enabled the growth of the world wide web for mass communication and self-promotion purposes, politically and socially. (Rainie, and Barry Wellman, 2012).

While the world-wide web has been a force for both positive social and political change, it has also become influential in a negative way too. The world wide web is addictive and this often means that people find themselves spending vast periods of time online. As Shotten, M. (1991, pp. 219) writes “ many early Internet users were computer hackers, who were <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-the-internet-on-political-and-social-change/>

characterized as preferring the machine to people. Often social outcasts, they turned first to the computer and then to the internet in lieu of people". Another reason why the rise of the internet has caused a negative impact in terms of political and societal change is people nowadays are more likely to make final decisions based off of what they see online rather than what their common knowledge tells them to.

Digital technologies don't produce effects by themselves, but instead form the platform from which these social and political effects can come about by altering the communication capacity. One significant societal change is the impact seen on communications and connections on an exponential level, enabling people and businesses to establish a physical presence.

Additionally, political change can be seen through an increase in social media usage surrounding political events, through which participation and interaction with voters allows the candidates to assert power and mediate perceptions. Although, contrasting ideas such as the addictiveness of the internet, argue that the rise of the world-wide web has also been a force for change in a detrimental way with it being the cause of factors such as social outcasts and the damaging of people's intellectual abilities. However, the rise of the world-wide web has most certainly had more of a positive impact than a negative impact on both political and societal change.

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