

Internet shaping the  
way we live today  
media essay



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The Rapid transformation and development of the World Wide Web otherwise known as the internet has changed and evolved the public and how they communicate and live in the world today. In this essay I will use Marshall McLuhan perspectives on Technological determinist to analyse this topic and its coverage in the media over recent years. There are a few main points to McLuhan's perspectives, First, inventions in communication technology cause cultural change. Secondly, changes in modes of communication shape human life. Thirdly Channels Of Communication are the primary cause of change. And finally, as McLuhan himself puts it, " We shape our tools, and they in turn shape us"( Steinberg 2007). In the following paragraphs I will be analysing McLuhan's views on technological determinism, how it applies to this particular subject and also looking at the coverage of this particular subject in the current media.

In my essay I will use the Internet and the medias coverage of the development and rapidly evolving use of this media, and how it in its own right has changed and pushed boundaries within cultures and countries in both social and political spheres. According to statistics the worlds internet usage had grown by approximately 450% over the past ten years which is a phenomenal amount in just that small period of time. 30% of the worlds population are now accessing the internet and benefiting from its use this figure was only a mere 0. 4% when the internet was first used in 1995.

Even Former United States president Bill Clinton noted its rapid growth when he was in the white house " When I took office, only high energy physicists had ever heard of what is called the World Wide Web... Now even my cat has it's own page". The internet has become a major part of the world we live in

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today and with that it has also brought change to cultures and to the way each individual now lives his/her life.

Thanks to the internet and websites( like video websites and social networking) the public are now free to chose what becomes popular through these websites and thus form culture in their own right. McLuhan's views on technological determinism are more then applicable to the situation with global internet growth . No one can doubt the massive implications it has had on the world today and in this essay I plan to give some examples as to why his views and beliefs are quite justified when it comes to this particular area.

China is now known as the worlds largest internet market according to an article in the English newspaper The Guardian. To date, China has over 420 million Internet users with double-digit growth rate in each of the last five years. But the population stands at 1. 3 billion, this shows that internet penetration( i. e. percentage of population) in China remains comparatively low - just 32%- compared to the US, where a recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project put the figure at over 70% of the population. With this rapid growth in internet use brings a lot of change and development within the Chinese culture. Since 2008 because of the rapid growth, expansion and endless information and material that can be found on the web China have censored a lot of the internet content available to their population. In a book of articles and essays by Chinese reporters and journalists called Changing Media, Changing China (Shirk 2010), one article outlines how the expansion and the sheer unlimited volumes of information which can be accessed changed how the nature of politics in China

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altogether " The commercialization of the media and growth of the Web have drastically increased the amount of information available to the Chinese people and 40 narrowed the information gap between the government and the public" Through their censorship of the internet the Chinese government are controlling what their public can and cannot watch. The need to do this is great for the government because the internet is a tool in which the population could uncover copious amounts of information on and incriminating their government. One of the first incident of censorship of the internet in china was in 1998 when Haung Qi's website was shutdown by government and police officials after becoming the centre for citizens to debate on issues from human rights to democracy. The BBC reported that in August 2001 Huang was taken away by the police and later charged and jailed for " attempting to subvert state power" (BBC. com 2002) This is only one example of how the internet has become a major problem. For the first time Chinese citizens from every part of the country are able to communicate and debate with each other like never before through one medium and even on one blog. Information which they never even thought could be reached a few years ago can now be accessed and interpreted and they can now have their say on these issues. The Chinese states once total power over all information has now deteriorated and will never be the same again because of the internet.

Politics all over the world has been transformed because of the arrival and rise in popularity of the internet. Many politicians and leaders are now members of twitter and face book and are using the internet and setting up personal websites to win votes in their local or national campaigns. American

president Barack Obama is one politician who was deemed to have owed most of his votes and his successful campaign to the use of internet strategy and marketing. According to Andrew Chadwick (2009) Barack Obama had targeted this means of winning votes long before he was selected to run for president. “ When the presidential campaign began with a flurry of announcements in early 2007, Barack Obama already had 64, 000 ‘ friends’ on MySpace, while Hilary Clintons site only registered 25, 000” He was very well prepared to try and gain support from the younger demographic which was in large supply on sites such as these. Chadwick also points out the absolute importance of this new communication tool ” By using the internet for research, communicating with supporters and activists, mobilizing voters, and raising funds, campaigns have carved out a critical niche” and president Obama was one of the first to use the power of internet growth to his advantage and create a new culture in politics. Obama was so sure of the internets potential that he created his own social networking site with similarities to Facebook called myBarackObama. com. In fact in an article in magazine Wired in 2008 it reported that Mr. Obama had enlisted the help of face book co-founder Chris Hughes to make the site as efficient as possible. “ By the end of the campaign, myBarackObama. com chalked up some 1. 5 million accounts. And Obama raised a record-breaking \$600 million in contributions from more than three million people, many of whom donated through the web”. President Obama is definitely the most high profile politician to of used the fantastic platform that is internet communication, but in Ireland too, politics have began to recognise the significance of the rise in internet users all around the globe. Ministers and TD’s all around the country have began to set up websites, face book profiles and twitter

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accounts to try propel themselves into the eye of the voters and the media to win votes and to retain their seats. Even Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny has been in the papers in recent days for a video he posted on the party's website aimed at the young demographic. The article in the Irish times mocks Kenny's sad attempt to win votes but also notes the change that is happening within the political scene. Kenny's attempt may have been dull and lifeless but it is more proof that politics is changing from on the ground to online. There is no doubt that the internet growth has changed the face of politics for good and set about a new online culture within the political world and I think we will see Irish and all politicians blogging, Facebook-ing and Youtube-ing for some time to come.

A major breakthrough over recent years was the emergence of social networking in the world of the internet. Websites like My Space, Facebook and Bebo have been sensations in the world of social networking and are a prime example of McLuhan's perspectives on Technological determinism. Websites such as these along with web video sites such as Youtube allow the the public to decide what becomes popular or what becomes culture. In a report in the telegraph in February 2009 journalist Nicholas Blincoe outlines how Facebook has completely changed the culture in England. He notes the importance of broadband as the big turning factor in the internets popularity in the public eye " Once the internet was switched on all the time, everyone from toddlers to maiden aunts became intimate with it" In James Harkins book " Cyburbia" he outlines how we are no longer able to restrain ourselves and are addicted to being involved on whatever is the newest fad on the internet at the time " yes, we are nuts and worse, we can no longer opt out".

Andrew Keen (2007) outlines his views on how the internet is destroying our culture and own values. He sees “ cultural standards and moral values” as being “ at stake” due to new media innovations. Different critics have their own views Keen believes that Facebook and myspace are destroying our culture and that we are becoming internet “ junkies”. Social networking sites are allowing people to communicate in so many ways,

reports in the media have shown people as using Facebook as a means of mourning , gaining self confidence or a way a company director can investigate a possible employee. It has created a new platform on which people can communicate, people now are always connected no matter where they live in the world. They can use the internet and these sites to maintain or even form relationships to make life long friends which could never have been possible before. The emergence of YouTube created a new window for the public to reinvent themselves or show off their talent in ways which could not have been used before. They could self-publish themselves on the internet with no need for talent scouts or agents. This sort of fame snatching has become so common that even those without talent try their hand at glory. “ Rarely a week goes by without news of another Youtube sensation rocketing to worldwide fame. The Youtube fame launch pad even has its own name “ YouToo” as in you too can become famous.” (Frazer and Dutta, 2008) . It has opened so many doors and opportunities for people where there are now endless possibilities as to what can happen next, with applications such as Skype(video calling) and I chat also becoming evermore popular. All of these sites that are ever changing culture as we know it and

are reinforcing McLuhan's views on technological determinism. We are using these tools and in return they are shaping the way we live.

The Internet plays a large role in what becomes popular and becomes culture. The individual does play a role, but it's more the mass public's need for change and using the individual as a stepping stone to create a snowball effect which will in turn reward whatever individual's intending to change culture. Culture is continually being adjusted and influenced no matter which individuals happen to be the instigator. It is affected very much by each individual in different ways. " We shape our tools, and they in turn shape us". This is in his own words Marshall McLuhan's ideas of technological determinism, the growth of the internet accurately becomes an example of his views. We made the internet, humans created it and now it is shaping , changing and even creating new ways for us to live. McLuhan had no knowledge of the internet's ominous creation but this theory does not just apply to the internet but any new technology which becomes popular with the public. I believe that McLuhan's ideas and theories of technological determinism will never be reinforced by new technology because culture is forever changing and we are in the new world of media and it can only keep changing as we progress into this ever exciting new era.

The internet is the best example of cultural change in the recent past, it has had a great effect on how every person from China, to politics to young teen social networkers live and act within their own social spheres. Technology is forever creating new cultures and I for one hope it will never change.