

Future of the Media--Media of
the Future

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I. Introduction

For several years, television systems around the globe moved in a profitable, and predictable way -- a handful of channels, in America and Japan mostly private and in Europe mostly public. But this world is no more. And so the questions arise, what next? And what are the implications?

II. The Three Television Revolutions

It helps to understand that television evolves in several stages. The first two are well-understood, the third is new. The first stage is limited **television**, followed by the second stage, **multichannel television**. This is the presently emerging system, but it is not the end of evolution. The third stage is **cyber-television**, the television of the future. Many governments and established media organizations are still resisting the emergence of the second stage, when what they should do is to focus on the third revolution, which poses a much more fundamental threat.

everyone projects their own fantasies, desires and fears for society. As the Russians say: Same bed, different dreams. Traditionalists find the dark forces of degeneracy. Libertarians find the heavy hand of government. Leftists find a new community, devoid of the material avarice of private business. This kind of dreaming is common for new and fundamental technology, and it is usually wrong.

New Information Flows will Destroy Traditional Institutions

In communications, one should take cognizance of a simple but basic principle: every time one makes a communications flow relatively more convenient, powerful, and cheap, one also makes a traditional communications flow relatively less convenient, less powerful, and more expensive. If one develops new routes of communication, old ones atrophy. When Columbus and Vasco de Gama opened up new trade routes, Venice became a museum. When highways were built, cities emptied.

Electronic communications similarly affect every institution. Take the example of banks. And when ATMs migrate into home PCs and cellular phones, users will download cybercash onto smartcards while at home or on the run, and banks will lose much of their traditional locational advantage.

Similarly, e-money will create "open money," stateless currencies that compete with each other, that may be accepted around the globe, but are responsible to no one. This is doubly ironic, because it coincides with efforts in Europe to create an elaborate official Euro super-currency - just when the whole concept of a state-controlled currency beginning its transformation into competitive private monies.

The Counter-Revolution

Similar changes due to cyber-media will affect every single one of society's institutions. But for every revolution there is a counter-revolution. And just as the industrial revolution of the Nineteenth Century led to the romantic movement as a reaction, so does the information age lead to a neo-romantic longing for the lost golden age.

This has always been the case. When movies were invented, traditionalists were outraged and sought a ban. Later, when sound was introduced into motion pictures, musicians' unions agitated that "sound movies are economic and cultural murder." When the radio arrived, researchers noted that "Parents have become aware of a puzzling change in the behavior of their children" The telephone was no exception to the dismissal of a new medium. Soon after its introduction, it was accused by a noted psychiatrist of driving people permanently insane.

In the 1950s and 1960s, many believed that computers would surely create a

1984-like state, and computers had a negative image as a centralized huge piece of equipment. Data protection laws were passed, based on the "Big Brother" image of the technology, just as computers became "distributed." But when the real 1984 rolled around, the fear had become that 14-year-olds would use computers to start a nuclear war on their own.

Today, a Cassandra industry is in full force, and an avalanche of anti-technology and neo-luddite literature is rolling in. The leading edge, as always, is the protection of children. Today's fears are the usual suspects in new garb: Impressionable children. Sex. Violence. Crime. Alienation. Extremist potential. Isolation. Information poverty. Cultural Deficits.

Where once lowest common denominator programming was decried for TV, we now mourn the loss of the national dialogue and of the common hearth. Where once youngsters were said not to communicate enough with each other and the world, they now are said to communicate excessively, obsessively, and sloppily.

Contrasting Prospective on Reaching the Information Age

In consequence, in America, the Computer Decency Act was adopted in the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Such laws will be struck down in America as unconstitutional because the U.S. has a very strong free speech protection in its

monetary, fiscal, and regulatory policies. Each one of these will be subject to erosion due to cyber-media. Conventional taxation will become difficult; money will be created and supplied by multi-national firms; and regulation will be undercut. But the traditional state is not powerless. After unsuccessfully trying to deal with new issues in the old ways, they will eventually deal with the issues in new ways. That some of these new ways are really quite old will be one of the central ironies of the information age.