

## **Political Communications**

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Political communications is an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public. The process operates down-wards from governing institutions towards citizens, horizontally in linkages among political actors, and also upwards from public opinion towards authorities. The literature in political communications can be sub-divided into three major categories, using a simple systems model of the process illustrated in Figure 1 to distinguish between the production, contents and effects.

[Figure 1 about here]

### *Production Processes*

Work on the production process focuses on how messages are generated by political actors like parties and interest groups, and then transmitted via both *direct* channels like political advertisements and *indirect* channels including newspapers, radio and television. Most of this work is at macro-level, with the nation-state taken as the basic unit of analysis, although media markets can map poorly in this regard, particularly regionalized systems like the press in Germany and Canada. Many studies have focused on the increased professionalization of political marketing campaigns in the post-war era, including the rise of the class of political consultants, pollsters, advertising executives, and their coterie, and the consequence of this process for strategic communications by political parties and interest groups. A large literature, particularly within Europe, has also studied the changing structure of the news industry, notably the economic basis of the newspaper industry and the legal structure regulating broadcasting and the press. Comparative studies have also commonly analyzed the news culture, especially the values that journalists, broadcasters and editors employ as 'gatekeepers' in deciding 'what's news', as well as the organizational structure of newsrooms. Recent work within this area has generated a growing body of research on the rise of new communication and information technologies, and use of the Internet by parties, new social movements and the news media. One

of the major challenges in this sub-field is to widen the scope of comparative research on a systematic basis to move from studies of the structure of the political communication process within particular nations to conceptual typologies, broader theories and empirical generalizations that can be tested across different types of societies. Much of this work has traditionally focused upon postindustrial nations, particularly the United States and Western Europe, although in the 1990s increased attention has been paid to new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia, as well as, to a lesser extent, the role of the news media in authoritarian regimes like Burma, China and Cuba where the free press and opposition movements remain severely restricted.

### *Contents*

Another related mainstream research tradition has examined the contents of the messages produced by this process, such as the amount and tone of political reporting presented in television news, the partisan balance in the press, the coverage of election campaigns and particular events, the agenda-setting reporting of policy issues, and the representation of social minorities in the news media. This analysis is commonly conducted at meso-level, focusing upon particular types of media, and the most common forms of comparison are among media within a particular country, for example differences in the messages conveyed during an election campaign in paid political advertisements, party press releases, newspaper columns and TV news stories. Other forms of comparison examine trends over time, such as the coverage of political scandals or social minorities in recent decades. More rarely, collaborative teams have attempted comparison across nations, for example concerning a specific period or event in selected major newspapers. Work in this tradition has drawn largely upon systematic forms of content analysis of a representative random sample of stories among different media, although alternative qualitative techniques for deconstructing textual and visual messages are also common. Moving beyond systematic description, which is valuable but limited, the main challenges in this area are to relate the content of the messages to either the production process (to examine their possible causes) or to their potential impact (to understand their effects).

### *Effects*

Lastly perhaps the largest body of research, certainly in the United States, has focused at individual or micro-level on the study of the potential effects of exposure to different types of political communication messages. Some of this work has been concerned with societal level diffuse effects but this is far rarer. The most common method has been to draw upon cross-sectional or panel representative surveys or, more rarely, experimental methods. The key issues have focused upon analyzing the potential impact of exposure to different type of mediated messages (such as watching an ad or news story) upon either political knowledge and opinions (such as awareness about an issue, civic knowledge, or recognition of political leaders), political attitudes and values (such as support for a particular party or issue), and political behavior (such as voting turnout). Most work has focused upon the impact of the messages on the mass public or particular sub-groups, like women or undecided voters, although some studies have also analyzed the effects upon middle-level elites involved in the policymaking process. The primary challenges are threefold: to expand generalizations beyond the United States, to see how far they continue to hold up within very different contexts; to move beyond cross-sectional surveys, which cannot determine issues of causality, towards more dynamic designs such as panel surveys and pre-post experimental designs; and, lastly, to link studies of the individual-level analysis of effects to both what we know about the structure of the news industry and the contents of the messages, generating multi-level and multinational research designs. This work has made considerable progress as the study of political communications has moved increasingly into the mainstream within political science since the 1980s, but nevertheless the sub-field remains predominantly American and European, and the process of internationalization in what is, increasingly a global society, is only starting produce more systematic cross-national and multi-level research.

Political communications has therefore always been central to the electoral and policymaking process but in the last decade certain important structural developments have fundamentally altered this process, particularly postwar trends in the mass media moving from the traditional world of newspapers, radio and television broadcasting towards the Internet. The rest of

this article outlines alternative interpretations of the nature of these trends and reflects on their consequences for the process of socioeconomic and political development around the globe.

### **Postwar Trends in Newspapers**

Concern about traditional standards of journalism has been fuelled by major changes in the newspaper industry during the post-war era. In the United States the daily press has experienced dwindling readership and sales, especially among the younger generation, a loss of advertising market share to the electronic media, and growing concentration of ownership in larger multiple newspaper chains or a few multi-media conglomerates<sup>1</sup>. All these developments have had a major impact upon the profitability and economic viability of the print sector in America, particularly for smaller outlets<sup>2</sup>. Yet although the demise of newspapers has been widely predicted for decades, we should not underestimate their continued popularity and technological adaptation to new forms of production and distribution. If we compare post-war trends in circulation, controlling for population growth, the evidence shows that sales of the daily press in most post-industrial societies has not been affected by the growing availability of electronic media. The long-term trend in newspaper sales in OECD countries, per 1000 population, has proved fairly stable. Average circulation in all OECD states was 271 newspapers per 1000 population in 1950, rising modestly in 1980, before subsiding slightly to 263 per 1000 in 1996<sup>3</sup>. In post-industrial societies, despite the massive surge in the availability of television during the last fifty years, about one quarter of the population continues to buy a daily newspaper, and readership figures are even higher. The electronic media have therefore increased the choice and diversity of news outlets and formats, but at the same time they have not killed sales of the printed press. Given growing educational levels and affluence characteristic of post-industrial societies, consumption of news has not proved a zero sum game.

Moreover there are considerable variations among societies in use of the traditional mass media. Figure 2 illustrates the penetration of newspapers and TV sets per 1000 population worldwide. The pattern confirms how far newspaper and TVs penetration levels are associated with basic patterns of socioeconomic development; use of the mass media is related to a more affluent and educated

population, with greater leisure time. Post-industrial societies tend to be the heaviest consumers of the mass media; nevertheless the pattern also shows considerable variations among these nations. Some outliers like the United States and Canada prove far more television-centric than average (along with Southern Mediterranean Europe and much of Latin America), while others nations like Norway and Sweden (along with much of Northern, Central and Eastern Europe) remain more newspaper-centric.

[Figure 2 about here]

It remains unclear whether systematic trends in the newspaper industry have changed traditional journalism, producing an increased focus on crime, sex and entertainment, as is assumed by some critics. What seems equally plausible across OECD countries is an expansion of both lowbrow and highbrow news media in recent decades, representing a diversification of the market. A recent review of the comparative literature by Kees Brants concluded that the few available content analysis studies provide an ambiguous and sometimes contradictory picture of the growth of 'infotainment' news in different countries, rather than showing a uniform pattern: "*Where for the European countries as a whole we might see a slight tendency towards the popularization of news, there is little evidence that politicians and politics are dramatically personalized and sensationalized than before.*"<sup>4</sup> Brants found that the available content analysis shows a mixed picture of the growth of 'infotainment' news in different European countries, rather than a uniform trend. Frank Esser concluded that there were marked contrasts between Germany, Britain and the United States in the popularity of tabloid news, and that the nature and degree of competition in a particular media market is the decisive factor explaining the degree of tabloidization<sup>5</sup>. Moreover systematic research on long-term trends in British newspapers from 1952-97 found that the amount of political coverage in the tabloid sector had not declined over time, as many critics assume. Instead, the tabloid press in Britain has expanded its coverage of entertainment but also maintained its political news during the last half century<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore across all post-industrial societies newspaper circulation levels have remained largely stable during the post-war era, yet at the same time the range of papers published in these states has contracted. The number of daily

newspapers published in OECD nations fell on average by 15% during the postwar era, from 160 per country in 1960 to 130 in 1996, producing greater concentration of readership in fewer outlets. Many countries have introduced measures to maintain press diversity, on the assumption that we need diverse outlets for an effective civic forum. Anti-trust regulations have attempted to insure competition in the ownership of the press, for example limiting the proportion of cross-media ownership by a single company, administered by fair trade bodies like the British Monopolies and Merger Commission or the German Federal Cartel Office. Other societies like Sweden and Norway have used press subsidies as a policy instrument to protect the financial viability of the more vulnerable sectors of the press<sup>7</sup>. Countries with provincial and localized newspaper markets like the United States and Germany proved particularly prone to media mergers and acquisitions, reducing pluralism and competition in many cities. Papers in smaller countries like Austria and Belgium also often experienced takeovers or closure because of a limited domestic market and imports from neighboring states with a shared common language.

Concentration of ownership in the hands of a few multinational corporations with multimedia empires has become increasingly common, notably Rupert Murdoch's News International, and the vast holdings of Bertelsmann in Germany, or Fininvest in Italy<sup>8</sup>. Hence Rupert Murdoch, who started with two small Australian newspapers, built an empire in News Corp. that includes 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox films, the Fox TV network, a number of US stations, 50% ownership of Sky TV, a majority interest in the STAR Asian satellite, ownership of *The Sun* and *The Times* in Britain, additional television stations in Latin America, and the book publisher HarperCollins, as well as investments in internet companies. In the United States, Time Warner's purchase of Turner Broadcasting Systems Inc (including CNN) in 1996 created the largest media firm in the world with strong print, cable, and programming divisions. Walt Disney Company's acquisition of Capital Cities/ABC Inc for \$19 billion in 1995 created the second largest media conglomerate with movie, television, cable and internet interests, although the purchase proved costly since ABC's profitability moved sharply into the red four years after acquisition. Conrad Black's acquisition of Southam in Canada in 1996 gave his company, Hollinger Inc, control of two-thirds of the newspapers in that country.

What will be the consequences of these developments? Many commentators like Ben Badakian fear that media mergers have concentrated excessive control in the hands of a few multinational corporations, who remain unaccountable to the public, and that only greater economic competition can change this situation<sup>9</sup>. Recognition of this problem has arisen from the understanding that economic controls can constrain the media just as significantly as political controls. There is nothing new about this concern, which was often expressed during the interwar era of the press barons when proprietors like Beaverbrook and Rothermere actively intervened to further their political ambitions. Yet others like Robert Picard remain more sanguine about recent developments, arguing that we need to distinguish between concentration defined by considering the number of media outlets held by dominant firms and concentration defined by dominance in a clear geographical market<sup>10</sup>. It is the latter, -- which can harm consumers by producing fewer choices, poorer services, and higher prices, -- which is important for the availability of alternative sources of political information in a democracy. Monopolies in the local market for ideas can be harmful for pluralism. Nevertheless it must be recognized that we need to look beyond any single media sector to establish the harmful political effects of concentration, since consumers use and have access to multiple sources of news and information, from newspapers to radio, television and the Internet. Moreover the trends towards greater concentration are not universal, as some OECD countries have seen a significant expansion in the circulation and range of daily newspapers being published in the post-war era, particularly states like Mexico and Greece where educational and literacy rates have been rising sharply, as well as more modest growth evident in newer democracies like Hungary, the Czech Republic and South Korea.

### **Trends in Broadcasting**

Just as there are serious concerns about the future of newspapers, so many believe that in recent decades traditional standards of television news and public affairs have come under threat from technological and economic developments. The critical factors transforming broadcasting include the proliferation of channels on terrestrial, cable, satellite, digital and now broadband services, fragmenting the mass audience; the crisis of identity and funding facing

public service television, which once enjoyed a monopoly throughout most of Europe, following the rise of myriad commercial competitors; and lastly the more recent technological convergence with the digitization and compression of images, sounds and data which has produced a new multimedia environment breaking down the traditional boundaries between telecommunications, the audiovisual industries and computers.

These trends have affected all OECD countries to different degrees although their impact and timing has been strongly mediated by the existing communications landscape. In the Thatcherite 1980s, deregulation and privatization had the most profound influence on public service broadcasters throughout Western Europe<sup>11</sup>. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the transition to democracy in the early 1990s produced an even more radical jolt to public television in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>12</sup>. Meanwhile in the United States the long-standing rule of the three major networks experienced an equivalent coup d'etat, cut down in the 1980s by myriad competitors on cable and satellite<sup>13</sup>. Despite the longstanding contrasts between the commercially dominant major networks in the United States and public television in Europe, in recent years both have faced a strikingly similar multiplication of outlets and fragmentation of television audiences, raising new concerns about the standards of programming.

Despite the deluge of commercial alternatives, the public channels remain popular; on average across all OECD states public channels maintain a 42% share of the television audience. This varies substantially, however, by country. Public television RAI1 and TVE1 remain market leaders in Italy and Spain, while NRK in Norway and SVT in Sweden had most of the best rated shows in their countries. In contrast public TV has a far smaller share in some other societies such as PBS (3%) in the United States and NHK (18%) in Japan<sup>14</sup>. Today OECD states can be classified into three major types: those that remain predominately *public* systems (based on an audience share of public channels of 60% and above), *mixed* systems (with a public share of 40-59%) and predominately *private* systems (with a public share of less than 40%). Where we have comparable data, today only three OECD nations can be categorized as predominately public (Austria, Denmark and Hungary), eleven represent mixed systems, while ten can be classified as predominately private systems. Therefore

although there has been growing transatlantic convergence over the years, nevertheless broadcasting systems continue to bear the distinct imprint of their origins with radio in the 1920s, and public television continues to remain popular in many countries, rather than being swamped by commercial services.

### **The Rise of the Internet**

In the last decade the most important change to the political communication process has occurred through the rise of the Internet, particularly in postindustrial societies that are at the forefront of the information society such as the United States, Australia and Sweden. Networked computing and computer-mediated email have existed for the scientific elite since the early 1960s but the number of users was too small to monitor through mass surveys. The key historic development transforming the Internet into the world's favorite virtual reference library, post office and shopping mall were a series of rapid innovations: the birth of the World Wide Web (in 1990) and the launch of popular browsers to access materials including those by Mosaic (1993), Netscape Navigator (1994), and Microsoft Internet Explorer (1995)<sup>15</sup>. Subsequent technological applications, like the easy transfer of .mp3 music files and video formats, and WAP-enabled digital telephony, while representing important innovations, cannot yet claim to have had an impact equal to the basic invention of point-and-click browsers.

As yet no official government statistics on the online population are collected by international agencies like UNESCO and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), although many indirect measures of technological diffusion are available, including investment in scientific Research and Development, the spread of computer hardware, and the rate of telephone density. The most comprehensive worldwide guide estimating the size of the online population is provided by NUA. This organization regularly monitors and collates survey results conducted by different market research companies in each nation. The surveys ask a representative sample of the public in each country about use of the Internet from home, work or elsewhere during the previous three months. NUA's database '*How Many Online*' currently collects data from 179 countries, covering 5.7 billion people<sup>16</sup>.

The NUA evidence highlights the dramatic rise in popularity of the Internet in recent years: between 1995 and 2000 the total number of Internet users surged from about 26 to 377 million worldwide, an explosive jump within the space of a few years. The Internet became a truly global phenomenon as more and more users came online from around the world and the proportion of Americans in the online community dropped from 70% to 40% in 1995-2000. Despite this remarkable expansion, today about one in twenty of the world's population is online, with highly uneven diffusion globally.

According to NUA estimates, in Spring 2000 Scandinavia and North America lead the world in rates of Internet penetration, with one third or more of the population online, followed by Western Europe, with about one in ten online. Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America fall below the world average, all with less than one in twenty online, while minimal diffusion is evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, with only 36 users per 1000 people. In terms of levels of human development, there are stark contrasts between rich and poor nations. Most of the world's online community (87%) lives in highly developed nations<sup>17</sup>. In comparison, the thirty-five societies classified by the UNDP with low levels of human development, like Nigeria, Bangladesh and Uganda, contained only 5% of the online population, although home to half a billion people.

A finer-grained comparison of countries ranked by the online population reveals a pattern of widespread adoption in four clusters of societies:

- Throughout the *smaller Nordic social democratic welfare states*, especially Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland;
- In larger *Anglo-American and English-speaking nations* including the US, Canada, Australia, and Britain;
- In the *Asian 'tiger' economies* of Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, as well as Japan; and lastly,
- In a few *smaller European nations* with above-average Internet use such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Slovenia, and Estonia.

At the bottom of the national rankings, with less than 0.5% of the population online, few Internet users are found throughout most of the poorer countries of

sub-Saharan Africa (with the exception of South Africa), as well as in many states in central Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.

Yet at the same time *if* technological diffusion can be achieved in poorer societies, and it is a big 'if', then many observers hope that the Internet provides multiple opportunities for socioeconomic and democratic development. Digital networks have the potential to broaden and enhance access to information and communications for remote rural areas and poorer neighborhoods, to strengthen the process of democratization under transitional regimes, and to ameliorate the endemic problems of poverty in the developing world. With connectivity as the umbilical cord, enthusiasts hope that the Internet will eventually serve multiple functions as the world's favorite public library, school classroom and medical database, post office and telephone, marketplace and shopping mall, channel for entertainment, culture and music, daily news resource for headlines, stocks and weather, and heterogeneous global public sphere. In the heady words of the G-8 Okinawa Charter: *"Our vision of an information society is one that better enables people to fulfill their potential and realize their aspirations. To this end we must ensure that IT serves the mutually supportive goals of creating sustainable economic growth, enhancing the public welfare, and fostering social cohesion, and work to fully realize its potential to strengthen democracy, increase transparency and accountability in governance, promote human rights, enhance cultural diversity, and to foster international peace and stability."*<sup>18</sup> The Internet may allow societies to leapfrog stages of technological and industrial development. On the production-side, if Bangalore companies can write software code for IBM or Microsoft, and if Costa Rica can manufacture chips for Intel, then potentially entrepreneurs can offer similar services from Malaysia, Brazil and South Africa. The Internet encourages market globalization: small craft industries and the tourism industry in Bali or the Maldives can deal directly with customers and holidaymakers in New York and London, irrespective of distance, the costs of advertising, and the intermediate distribution chains of travel agents and retail businesses<sup>19</sup>. The Internet also offers promise for the delivery of basic social services like education and health information across the globe, a function that may be particularly important for middle-level professionals serving their broader community<sup>20</sup>. Potentially local teachers or community officials connected to the digital world in Lagos, Beijing or Calcutta can access the same electronic

journals, books and databases as students at the Sorbonne, Oxford or Harvard. Distance learning can widen access to training and education, via open universities in India, Africa and Thailand, and language websites for schools<sup>21</sup>. Networks of hospitals and health care professionals in the Ukraine, Mozambique and Stockholm can pool expertise and knowledge about the latest research on AIDS. Peasant farmers using village community centers can learn about storm warnings and market prices for their crops, along with employment opportunities in local towns. Where peripheral regions are lack access to the traditional media, the convergence of communication technologies mean that potentially the Internet can deliver virtual local newspapers, streaming radio and television video, as well as other services.

Numerous examples can be cited to show the potential of digital technologies for fostering new opportunities for development in societies around the world<sup>22</sup>. Many South East Asian nations seek to emulate the Japanese model of development in the post-war era of reconstruction, and the knowledge-based economy in Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. In Malaysia, for example, the Multimedia Super Corridor has been developed to bring investment from telecommunications, multimedia and electronics companies, and the production of silicon wafers and software. The corridor has attracted major players such as Microsoft, Sun Systems and NTT (Japanese telecom). Under the 'Vision 2020' plan, Malaysia now boasts cellular telephone penetration rates of one in every ten people, more and more wired schools, and 21 Internet hosts per 1000 people. Revenue generated by the production of information and communication technology goods, like office equipment, telecommunications and consumer audiovisuals, shows that the U.S. leads the world but many Asian countries are close rivals, including Japan (2<sup>nd</sup>), Korea (3<sup>rd</sup>), Singapore (4<sup>th</sup>), Taiwan (7<sup>th</sup>) and Malaysia (8<sup>th</sup>)<sup>23</sup>. Southern India is most often cited as an important area of software development, producing an estimated \$3.8 billion in revenues, with this figure doubling in the past few years. Over one-half of India's software services are exported to the United States<sup>24</sup>. The Bangalore area has attracted inward investment from many major corporations, not least from the Diaspora of the Asian dot.com entrepreneurs thriving in California's Silicon Valley and Cambridge's Technology Park<sup>25</sup>. In rural Bangladesh many isolated communities lack landline telephones. An innovative program by Grameen Telecom supplies

cellular mobile phones to village women, who rent calls in their community to repay the loan and sustain thriving micro enterprises<sup>26</sup>. With this service, local communities benefit by direct links to job, weather and health information, as well as more efficient markets for their produce. Village Telecom Centers are being developed with email and fax services, along with computer literacy projects in selected school.

In Central and Eastern Europe, Slovenia, Estonia and Slovakia have made great strides in moving their populations online, moving well ahead of Portugal, Greece and Austria in levels of connectivity. Hungary's ambitious Schoolnet program has allowed students in two-thirds of all secondary schools to browse the Web from their classrooms, with extensive teaching resources, interactive discussion forums, events, and competitions<sup>27</sup>. In the Baltic, the Estonian government has provided public access points for the Internet throughout the country, using schools, post offices, community centers, libraries, police stations and health clinics. The program has been highly successful; today more than one in ten Estonians is on-line, with personal computer ownership well above average for Central and Eastern Europe<sup>28</sup>.

Progress has been slower in Africa, but nevertheless plans have been announced by Global Crossing, Lucent Technologies and Africa One for an ambitious \$1.9 billion project to link up the whole continent by 2002 through a high-speed underwater fiber optic cable, with interior countries connected through terrestrial cables, microwave or satellite facilities, overcoming many of the current problems of the inadequate telephony infrastructure<sup>29</sup>. Given a high-speed backbone, and market liberalization of telecommunication services, African nations may also be able to 'leapfrog' stages of industrialization through new technology by investing in fully digitized telecommunications networks rather than outdated analog-based systems. Cellular telephony is rapidly expanding as an alternative to conventional network services; the number of subscribers in the OECD region reached almost one quarter of the population in 1998<sup>30</sup>. This growth has had even greater impact in the developing world. In postindustrial economies there were 20 times as many mobile phones in 1998 as there were in 1990, and in developing economies there 160 times as many, an astonishing rise<sup>31</sup>. Over a third of all telephone subscribers in Cote d'Ivoire, Cambodia and

Paraguay, for instance, are now connected via mobiles, a far higher proportion than in the United States<sup>32</sup>.

### **The Consequences for Democracy and Democratization**

What will be the political consequences of changes in the traditional news media and the subsequent rise of the Internet? In many ways it remains far too early to say<sup>33</sup>. The Internet has generated deeply contested alternative visions about the future. Luddites fear for the worse, but technophiles hope for the better.

The most positive perspective is held by *cyber-optimists* who emphasize the Panglossian possibilities of the Internet for the involvement of ordinary citizens in direct democracy. In its more utopian manifestations, this view has been dubbed 'technoromanticism'<sup>34</sup>, expressed in earlier eras in response to Samuel Morse's electric telegraph, Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, and Guglielmo Marconi's wireless radio<sup>35</sup>. In this account, digital technologies hold promise as a mechanism facilitating alternative channels of civic engagement such as political chat-rooms, electronic voting in general elections and for referenda issues, and the mobilization of virtual communities, revitalizing levels of mass participation in public affairs<sup>36</sup>. The use of the Internet by groups and social movements is often believed to exemplify digital politics.

The more utopian visions of the Internet suggest a future society in which virtually unlimited qualities of information become available, civic society flourishes, government decision-making becomes more open and transparent, and nation-state borders are eroded as people build virtual communities for work, learning and leisure spanning traditional boundaries of time and place. Although still in its adolescence, the core transformative capacities of the Internet include its potential for radically shrinking communications and information costs, maximizing speed, broadening reach, and eradicating distance. Compared with radio, television and newspapers, controlled by editors and broadcasters, the World Wide Web facilitates a virtually unlimited choice of information and communication one-to-one (e.g. via email), one-to-many (e.g. via a personal home page or electronic conference), many-to-one (e.g. via an electronic poll) and, perhaps most importantly, many-to-many (e.g. an online chat room), with a minimal role for gatekeepers or government censors<sup>37</sup>. Internet messages have the capacity to flow further, faster and with fewer intermediaries.

As a result many hope that recent developments, especially the spread of new information and communication technologies, will serve to undermine authoritarian regimes, creating a 'dictators' dilemma' in countries like Burma, China and Cuba<sup>38</sup>. Leaders in these nations want to facilitate economic development through the Internet and yet at the same time they seek to restrict political access. It is also believed that the Internet will have major consequences for electoral democracies, countries like Russia, Taiwan and Mexico that are seeing to consolidate democratic political institutions.

Yet as the Internet evolved, a darker vision has been articulated among *cyber-pessimists* who regard digital technology as a Pandora's box unleashing new inequalities of power and wealth, reinforcing deeper divisions between the information rich and poor, the tuned-in and the tuned-out, the activists and the disengaged. This account stresses that the global and social divides already discussed mean that Internet politics will disproportionately benefit the elite<sup>39</sup>. In this perspective, despite the potential for technological innovations, traditional interests and established authorities have the capacity to reassert their control in the virtual political sphere, just as traditional multinational corporations have the ability to reestablish their predominance in the world of e-commerce<sup>40</sup>. In this view, so far the potential of the Internet has failed to have a dramatic impact on the practical reality of 'politics as usual', for good or ill, even in countries at the forefront of digital technologies<sup>41</sup>. There are fear that continued inequalities in the spread of new technologies will exacerbate the traditional North-South divide evident in access to the traditional news media like newspapers, radio and television. As such, while some developing countries may manage to leapfrog earlier technologies in the race towards the information society, other poorer societies may drop even further behind.

The debate between the cyber-optimists and pessimists continues and as the Internet continues to evolve over the next decade then the impact of new technologies will become evident, whether for good (as some hope) or ill (as others fear). What is certainly clear is that political communications via the old world of newspapers and television is in the process of fundamental change and this process holds both threats and promises for the future of socioeconomic and political development.



Figure 1:

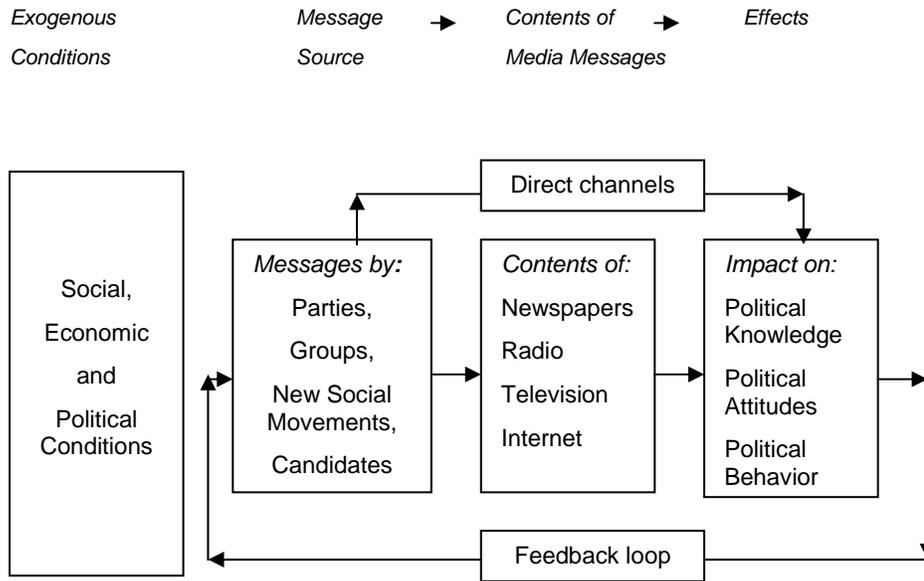
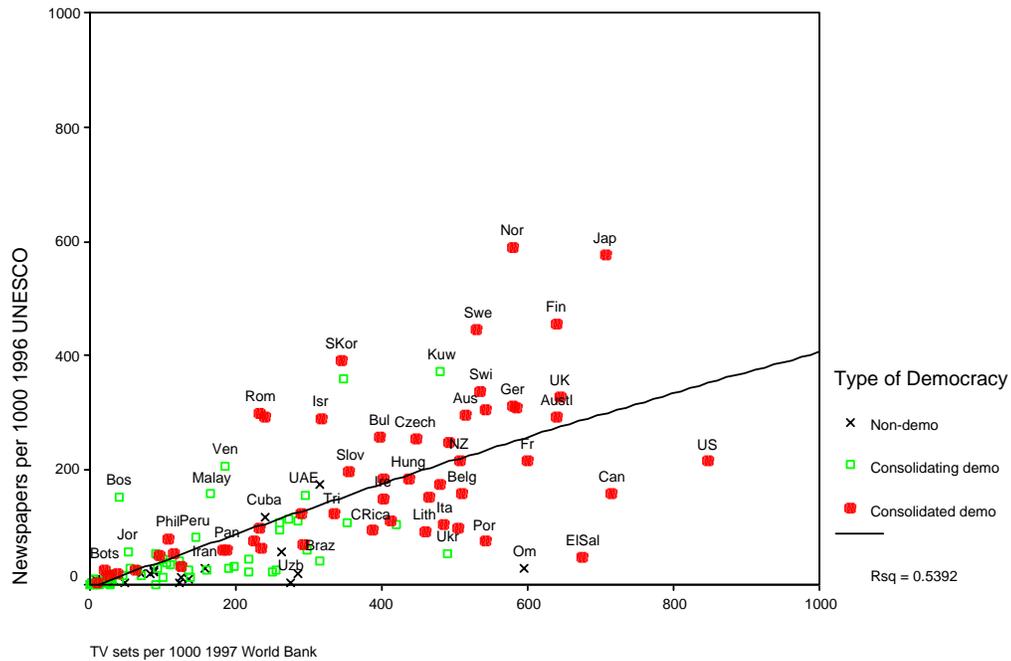


Figure 2: The worldwide distribution of newspapers and TV sets, mid-1990s



Sources:

*Newspapers per 1000 population, 1996:* UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, Paris: UNESCO.

*TV Sets per 1000 population, 1997:* World Bank.

*Type of Democracy:* Based on the Freedom House classification of political rights and civil liberties.

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<sup>1</sup> John H. McManus. 1994. *Market Driven Journalism*. London: Sage; William F. Baker and George Dessart. 1998. *Down the Tube*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>2</sup> Els De Bens and Helge Ostbye. 'The European Newspaper Market.' In *Media Policy: Convergence, Concentration and Commerce*. Eds. Denis McQuail and Karen Siune. London: Sage.

<sup>3</sup> *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook*. Successive annual volumes. Paris: UNESCO

<sup>4</sup> Kees Brants. 1998. 'Who's Afraid of Infotainment?' *European Journal of Communication*. 13(3): 315-335.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Esser. 1999. 'Tabloidization of News: A Comparative Analysis of Anglo-American and German Press Journalism.' *European Journal of Communication*. 14(3): 291-324.

<sup>6</sup> Shelley McLachlan and Peter Golding. 1999. 'Tabloidization in the British Press: A Quantitative Investigation into Changes Within British Newspapers from 1952-1997'. *Communication Research Centre Working Paper #9*. Loughborough: Loughborough University; Shelley McLachlan. 1999. 'Who's Afraid of the News Bunny? The Changing Face of the Television Evening News Broadcast.' *Information and Democracy Research Project: Working Paper No.3*. Loughborough, Loughborough University.

<sup>7</sup> See Denis McQuail and Karen Siune. 1998. *Media Policy: Convergence, Concentration and Commerce*. London: Sage

<sup>8</sup> See Jeremy Tunstall and Michael Palmer. 1991. *Media Moguls*. London: Routledge; Anthony Smith. 1991. *The Age of Behemoths: The Globalization of Mass Media Firms*. New York: Priority Press; Alfonso Sanchez-Tabernero. 1993. *Media Concentration in Europe: Commercial Enterprises and the Public Interest*. London: John Libbey.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Bagdikian. 1997. *The Media Monopoly*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Leo Bogart. 1995. *Commercial Culture*.

<sup>10</sup> Robert G. Picard. 1988. *Press Concentration and Monopoly: New Perspectives on Newspaper Ownership and Operation*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.;

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Robert G. Picard. 1998. 'Media Concentration, Economics, and Regulation.' In *The Politics of News: The News of Politics*, edited by Doris Graber, Denis McQuail and Pippa Norris. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

<sup>11</sup> Yves Achille and Jacques Ibanez Bueno. 1994. *Les televisions publiques en quete d'avenir*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick O'Neill. 1998. *Post-Communism and the Media in Eastern Europe*. London: Frank Cass.

<sup>13</sup> Penn Kimball. 1994. *Downsizing The News: Network Cutbacks in the Nation's Capital*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

<sup>14</sup> Mediametrie. 1999. *One Television Year in the World. 1998*. Paris: Mediametrie.

<sup>15</sup> For a personal history of these developments see Tim Berners-Lee. 2000. *Weaving the Web*. NY: HarperBusiness.

<sup>16</sup> Data from NUA. <http://www.nua.ie>.

<sup>17</sup> Human Development is measured using the UNDP index combining three factors: *longevity* as measured by life expectancy at birth; *educational attainment* as measured by adult literacy and school enrolment, and *standard of living* measured by real GDP per capita. See UNDP. 1999. *Human Development Report 1999*. NY: UNDP/Oxford.

<sup>18</sup> G-8 *Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society*. 23 July 2000.

<http://www.g8kyushu-okinawa.go.jp/w/documents/it1.html>.

<sup>19</sup> International Telecommunications Union. 1999. *Challenges to the Network: Internet for Development*. Geneva: ITU. P.7; Celia W. Dugger. 2000. 'Connecting Rural India to the World.' *New York Times* 28 May. <http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/yr/mo/biztech/articles/28india.html>

<sup>20</sup> Tim Hayward. 1995. *Info-Rich, Info-Poor: Access and Exchange in the Global Information Society*. K.G.Saur; William Wresch. 1996. *Disconnected: Haves and Have-Nots in the Information Age*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

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- <sup>21</sup> S. Arunachalam. 1999. 'Information and Knowledge in the Age of Electronic Communication: A Developing Country Perspective.' *Journal of Information Science*. 25(6): 465-476.
- <sup>22</sup> World Economic Forum. 2000. *From the Global Digital Divide to the Global Digital Opportunity: Proposals submitted to the G-8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit 2000*. [www.ceip.org](http://www.ceip.org)
- <sup>23</sup> OECD. 2000. *OECD Information and Technology Outlook*. OECD: Paris. Table 2 p.24.
- <sup>24</sup> OECD. 2000. *OECD Information and Technology Outlook*. OECD: Paris.
- <sup>25</sup> For a discussion see Ed Yourdon. 1996. *The Rise and Resurrection of the American Programmer*. NY: Prentice Hall.
- <sup>26</sup> By Spring 2000, over 1000 phones have been provided, serving 65,000 people, and the eventual target is 40,000 phones. See Don Richardson. 2000. *Grameen's Telecom's Village Phone Programme in Rural Bangladesh*. Telecommons Development Group, Ontario. <http://www.telecommons.com>. See also <http://www.grameenphone.com>
- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.SuliNet.hu>
- <sup>28</sup> UNDP. 1999. *Human Development Report 1999*. NY: UNDP/Oxford. P.64.
- <sup>29</sup> *Wired News*. June 5 2000. 'Africa One Project Targets 2002.' For details see [www.AfricaOne.com](http://www.AfricaOne.com)
- <sup>30</sup> OECD. 2000. *OECD Information and Technology Outlook*. OECD: Paris. P. 81.
- <sup>31</sup> The World Bank. 2000. *World Development Indicators 2000*. P.299. [www.worldbank.org/data](http://www.worldbank.org/data).
- <sup>32</sup> International Telecommunications Union. 1999. *Challenges to the Network: Internet for Development*. Geneva: ITU.
- <sup>33</sup> For a detailed discussion see Pippa Norris. 2001. *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Coyne. 1999. *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Richard Rhodes. (Ed). 1999. *Visions of Technology*. NY: Simon & Schuster; Carroll W. Pursell. 1995. *The Machine in America: a Social History of Technology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; Steven Lubar. 1993. *Infoculture: The Smithsonian Book of Information Age Inventions*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company

<sup>36</sup> See Benjamin R. Barber. 1998. 'Three scenarios for the Future of Technology and Strong Democracy.' *Political Science Quarterly*. 113(4): 573-589.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Andrew L Shapiro. 1999. *The Control Revolution: How the Internet is Putting Individuals in Charge and Changing the World we Know*. New York: Public Affairs. See also Christopher Weare. 2000. 'Technology and politics: Linking the Internet to changes in democratic governance.' Paper presented at the *International Political Science Association World Congress*, Quebec August.

<sup>38</sup> William Drake, Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas 'Dictatorships in the Digital Age: Some Considerations on the Internet in China and Cuba.' *iMP: The Magazine on Information Impacts*.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Peter Golding. 1996. 'World Wide Wedge: Division and Contradiction in the Global Information Infrastructure.' *Monthly Review* 48(3): 70-85; Peter Golding. 1998. 'Global Village or Cultural Pillage? The Unequal Inheritance of the communication revolution.' In *Capitalism and the Information Age: The Political Economy of the Global Communication Revolution* Eds. R. W. McChesney, E. Meiksins Wood and J. B. Foster. New York: Monthly Review Press; Peter Golding. 2000. 'Information and Communications Technologies and the Sociology of the Future.' *Sociology*. 34(1): 165-184.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Robert W. McChesney. 1999. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press. Pp182-185.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Margolis and David Resnick. 2000. *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace 'Revolution'*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.