

Chapter 3 – Approaches to new media

The hype: belief that technology is socially progressive

- That it is the new cutting edge or the place for forward thinking
- Cyberspace is probably one of the most over-hyped terms of the latter part of the 20th century

Digital media provides a decentralizing and globalizing force when it decouples production and removes or reduces the need for being co-present to coordinate our activities

Dot-com crash of 2001 – rapid devaluation of stocks in technology companies, especially those based on the Internet – attributed to hyperbolized potential of tech companies

“The internet is a concrete expression of uniquely American values of entrepreneurship and rugged individualism, and identified cyberspace as the “land of knowledge”... civilizations truest, highest calling” and the basis for creation of a new civilization, founded in the eternal truths of the American idea” (Alvin Toffler)

Table 3.1 Social Implications of the Internet

Internet Impact	Positive	Negative
1. Inequality	New access to information based on computer use and availability (digital opportunity)	Patterns of access, availability, and use of ICTs reflect other social inequalities (digital divide)
2. Community	New forms of social interaction and community formation through virtual communities that are not space-bound	Online activities become an obstacle to real-life interactions; declining commitment to locality-based social capital formation
3. Politics	New opportunities for online political engagement, information exchange, and deliberation; a virtual public sphere	Isolation from others in politically effective geographical locales; management of participation by political and economic elites
4. Organizations	Flexible organizations; networked interaction among those within and outside of the organization; more “horizontal” channels of online communication	New forms of internal surveillance; online communication remains hierarchical; online as a low-trust communications environment
5. Culture	“Demassification” of access to and use of media content; new opportunities for users to become media producers (“producers” [Bruns 2005])	Hyper-segmentation and “I media” as a barrier to communication with others; fragmentation and dilution of a common culture

New Empiricism: Tries to ground new media studies in real data and the real experiences of those who use media.

Three Implications:

- Empiricism lends itself to statistically based sociology and quantitative, survey-based methodologies that are intended to generate advice for government policy-makers on managing

technological change. Explores interaction between technology and culture in future oriented terms (speculative media theory).

- Questions whether policy-making organizations possess sufficient distance from powerful private interests. Looks at the use of media in everyday life using online ethnography.
- Tends to be an afterthought, to manage change rather than to make change
- Consider the recurring significance of optimism about new media as a form of myth that is historically grounded.

Technological determinism: culture and social changes are caused by technological progress

Social shaping of technology

- Alternative approach to technological determinism that seeks to explain technological change in terms of key social groups

Diffusion of innovations model

- Spread of innovations within a market or society

Political economy approach

- Examination of the regulation and ownership of media

Critical theory of technology

- Emphasizes the importance of understanding how power (especially economic power) has and continues to influence the operation and evolution of technology in society

Computer-mediated communication (CMC)

- Use of computers to exchange messages
 - Email, forums, blogs, wikis, instant messaging