

EMERGENCE OF NEW MEDIA AND THE QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS: A PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts at providing an analytical insight into the emergence of a new media and cyber world along with the socio-political arrangements around it. It also tries to highlight the importance of new media in India and its entry into Kashmir, where the penetration of this media is increasing at a fast pace

The journey of the media has seen different eras and phases reflecting the change in the audience's tastes, which again was based on the how media evolved its offerings. The world has now seen a shift from industrial society to the current information society, with the development and proliferation of communication patterns, information technology and media.

This media is acting as a superhighway of information, new platform for user-generated content, interaction and communication. It will be interesting to see how the Indian Society has adopted to this media through general instances, while reflecting upon the studies conducted. The rise of the Internet challenges both the traditional theories of communication and the relationship between media and society. The paper attempts to reflect upon this and also analyze the social, cultural, and ethical debates and concerns that have emerged from it. It will discuss the social consequences as a result of openness of this media, which include copyright issues, privacy and identity concerns, exposure to porn and violence and cyber bullying and other crimes etc.

Keywords: Internet, Cyber Bullying, Facebook, Kashmir, Global Village

1. From Old Media to New Media

Human civilization has, since its inception, revolved around the desire to 'communicate,' as this resulted in the formation of communities. With the passage of time, there have been endless developments towards what we have today in the form of Mass Media, which fulfilled this need for communication. The journey of the media has seen different eras and phases reflecting the change in the audience's tastes, which again was based on the how media evolved its offerings. The world has now seen a shift from industrial society to the current information society, with the development and proliferation of communication patterns, information technology and media. From Newspapers, magazines, films, radio and television broadcasting, which Gorman and McLean (2009) i call the '*Traditional or Mainstream Media*', the world of communications has moved to New Media. They see the emergence of New Media in two waves. The first wave was when the term- 'New Media' became popular in 1990s to describe the changes dating from 1980s, and the first wave included video, new ways of delivering television (via cable, satellite, direct broadcasting by satellite/ DBS) on a subscription basis (pay television), CD-ROMs, various forms of multimedia, advanced facsimile machines, handheld databanks, electronic books and videotext networks. ii Second wave is characterized by tremendous upsurge of the internet and World Wide Web.

Thus, even after an explosion of in the world of Television and satellite communication channels, the need for information has been ever increasing. Considering the complicity of the today's world and lack of

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time on part of the modern man and his reluctance due to the fast changing world to follow the old forms of media, technology has been developed accordingly. This has eased the process of 'knowing about the world' to a higher degree. The transition from old forms to new media has been further accelerated by the complimenting features of new media. Audiences now look for something which can provide them everything at one place and that need was addressed by internet. In addition, it has become disturbingly clear that the growing popularity of new media and its ability to address specific target audiences has the potential to impact negatively the ability of meeting the client business and communications needs done by the traditional Public Relations and advertising agencies,' which have not developed awareness of or the skills necessary to cope with new media challenges. This was realized by the American President, Barack Obama and his campaign team, and the reasons behind his scoring a clear edge over his rivals was his 'image' developed through usage of various media, across board, and most important floating the popular slogan of 'Change' and 'Yes, we can' through Social media including YouTube etc. Even the old media has to adapt to the newest trends for their sustenance today.

There are some striking differences between traditional and 'New Media,' which highlight the process of this transformation of unidirectional communication to a random pattern of communication, whose source is not necessarily placed at the beginning of the chain. Some of these unique characteristics responsible for its phenomenal growth are its interactivity, speed, low cost for serving various purposes like business promotion, dissemination of information to a larger group of masses etc., convergence, feedback, storage options, access to number of sources are few among others. But while these can be seen as providing a competitive edge to this media form, there are issues that depict its flaws, which still have no answers, which pop-up in the form of concerns raised by the society vis-a-viz New Media.

This has not only changed the process of the exchange and delivery of messages but also influenced the entire socio-economic, geo-political and socio-political global order of which we are a part. Thus, present times are a witness to the concepts of information superhighway, artificial intelligence, convergence and other creations of techie minds, which together have contributed in the process of 'Globalization'. As Keohane and Nye (2000)ⁱⁱⁱ have suggested, it is not so much the increase in 'message velocity' which marks out the present era since the leap in the speed of communications occurred in the 19th century. Rather it is 'institutional velocity', the intensity of interactions (or the 'thickness' of globalism) and the response of actors that marks out the present era.^{iv} Thus, new media is a manifestation of IT, internet, WWW etc. and its relationship with this knowledge society and pattern of usage among the users.

The arrival of a plethora of new or "emerging" media in the past few years has posed an entire array of new agency challenges. The growth and popularity of consumer/user-generated news and information has lessened to some degree the power of "third party credibility" inter-alia other points of discord between the technophiles and the technophobes or as Pinter (2008) calls them Athenians and Orwellians respectively.

2. Emergence of Internet and the WWW

When we look at today's information society, a phrase popularized during 1960s and early 1970s to commemorate the emergence of technology, it becomes clear that the entire dynamics of 'how the future world was going to be like' have changed from what the world used to be. Babbage's 'Analytical Engine' a steam powered device about the size of a football ground^v, though not successful in terms of practicality

still proved to be a threshold for others down the line working on developing technology. Combined with the US Department of Defense's venture in the form of Advances Research Program Agency Network (ARPANET) can be seen as the pioneering steps towards what we have today.

After being confined to governments, scientists or computer experts, internet was handed over to the private sector that slowly widened its reach and simultaneous technological developments gave us the Internet in 1980s. Gorman and Mclean (2009) indicate that during the early development of internet, it not only was a mode of communication and transference of information, but it also began projecting expression and terms like 'Cyberspace' gained currency from William Gibson's 1989 novel, *Neuromancer*. The growth of the Information technology has created a different sphere - 'virtual world' for all those who are its users- popularly known as the 'Netizens,' and thus emerges the notion of 'Virtual Community'. Howard Rheingold used this term *Virtual Community* for the title of a book about the collections of people who commingle on the internet in a wide variety of computer-mediated social groups usually based on the mutual interest and irrespective of geographical proximity.^{vi}

Following privatization of internet, the concurrent commercialization process and entry of media giants like Compuserve, America Online and its commercial relationship with German group Bertelsmann and the French group Hachette^{vii}, News Corporation etc. changed the scenario altogether, converting it into a viable market. It was made possible because of two reasons, one being the creation of the World Wide Web' or the 'WWW' in 1990 and second being the development of user-friendly navigation tools in the form of browsers^{viii} and the first of these 'browsers' being Gopher and Mosaic. Today, it has spread greatly, both in terms of technology and usage.

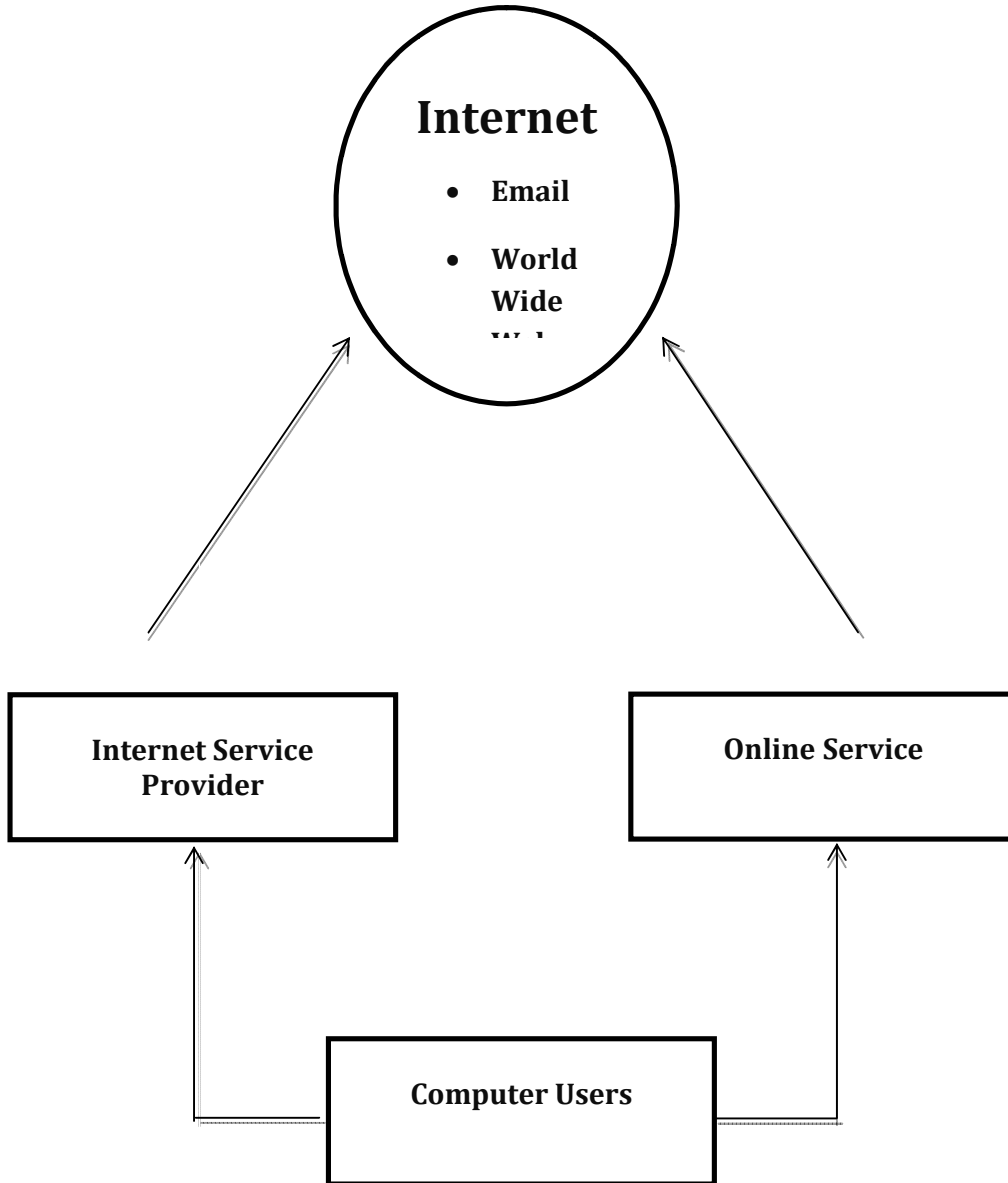
3. New Media as a Communication Tool

New Media, Information and Communication Technologies particularly digital media (computers, the internet, software culture and the new digital peer-to-peer networks for the sharing of data and cultural material) are vital to the process of dialogue, interaction and exchange. Dominick (2002) gives a schematic view of the relationship between internet and some of its major elements (Figure1). At the bottom of the diagram is the audience, the people who provide content for and access content from the internet. They gain access to the internet in one of two ways:

- 1) Through an Internet Service Provider (ISP), a company that connects a subscriber to the net and usually charges a few. Many companies, including some local phone companies, function as ISPs.
- 2) Through a commercial online service, such as America Online or MSN.^{ix}

Millions of people are empowered to project their identities to the world virtually through Websites etc., which is the order of this era. In short, Internet has emerged both as a medium that has greatly expanded access to multiple sources of information and as a platform that has enabled individuals to become producers as well as consumers of online content.^xIt serves as an essential tool for communication link, an important source of news that is available on it, an appropriate channel for distributing content, suitable channel for expression and sharing of knowledge and ideas, even emotions of all types in the digital form (including software, music, photos, literature and videos) and an enthusiastic place for electronic-commerce from any place and at any point in time in the sphere of personal, professional, social, political and business aspects. This means that even the remotest geographical areas are accessible virtually, if on the World Wide Web and the information provided through it is instant. Thus, it creates a

unique niche among the masses for its characteristics of speed and user-interface. Although, Internet is old news now, but its 700 million users are changing business and society so fast that it is sometimes hard to keep up, and the revolution is just the beginning.^{xi}From the last few years, internet users have drastically increased making the world to shrink more and more, which Marshall McLuhan called as 'Global Village'.



4. Role of New Media Today

The current 21st century mediascape, which is driven by technology and provided through the platform of new media, has made available bulk of data to its users, which is why internet is referred to as the 'Information Superhighway'. 'Google the modern day virtual big-daddy of encyclopedia is the most prominent part of this new media revolution that has become synonymous with search for anything. It is one amongst many search engines, which offers entry into the world of information, content, links, connection and almost everything that is present inside the virtual space and as they say 'If it is not on Google, it does not exist.' While it has eased the way of gathering and collecting information, there are other negative aspects which have crept in with time. Professor Juan Cole of University of Michigan defined Google Smear^{xii}, shares an interesting anecdote, "The Google search has become so popular that prospective couples planning a date will Google one another. Mark Levine, a historian at the University of California Irvine, tells the story of how a radio talk show host called him a liar because he referred to an incident that the host could not find on Google. That is, '*if it isn't in Google, it didn't happen.*' (Levine was able to retrieve the incident from Lexis Nexis, a restricted database)." All this defines how the way, a 'Googlist' looks at information and its tools has changed and how his behavioral patterns in this regard have evolved through 'Googlism. A phrase often used in the normal discourses often says, 'Just Google it,' although, not every web page on the internet is linked to Google.

Because of the online world, the audiences instead of waiting patiently for the scheduled evening/morning newscast or print run, have developed a crushing need to access news and information practically before it exists, and so there is a growing rush to find out what's new or breathtaking as quickly as possible via the thousands and millions of blogs, podcasts, social network sites and other New Media that mushroom exponentially on a daily basis. Anyone can access anything online from any place, whether it is the most-circulated newspaper from New York or a recipe from the interiors of Africa or an old movie song from the Indian film industry, almost everything is made available through this search engines. Besides, being a source for various things, the interactivity has popularized it furthermore, and this phenomenon known as the 'Web 2.0', which enables participation and interaction from users came into existence after 2004. Tim Berners Lee, who pioneered the first World Wide Web ("Web 1.0"), has argued, among others, that it does not refer to an update in technological specifications but rather to changes in the ways the Web is used.^{xiii} Any person can comment on any recently published article or writing by even the otherwise inaccessible writers and journalists like Robert Fisk or Fareed Zakaria. Public can 'tweet' (using the social networking site 'twitter' a public platform) about any government policy or action or any individual and express his or her dissent or consent, and even register their grievances or highlight their accomplishment as a 'citizen journalist' using any website of a news organization, which promotes citizen journalism.

All this is indicative of a shift from top-down or a unidirectional communication in traditional media to a totally unorganized and uncontrollable flow of communication. People have assumed a right to expression and more so through New Media and like to be heard on the issues of politics, governance, economy so on and so forth. Instances of this can be profoundly taken from the recent past, whether it was the circulation of photographs leaked from the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, which showed the excessive use of abuse by prison authorities from US-Led forces, latest Arab Uprising in which social networking websites played a major role in the political and social mobilization of masses or the emergence of alternate

media from not just western democracies but the other places as well. We see the phenomenon of user-generated data picking up, which has given common people a power to create news. This is the 'global billboard society' and there is a growing trend of tools for it- webpages, blogs, portals, social networking sites, audio and video sharing platforms such as Youtube, bulletin boards, wikis etc. another example where 'Blogging,' which can be done by individuals and groups mobilized people was seen in Egypt before the recent uprising. When Egypt's state-run *Al-Ahram* daily published a doctored photo that showed President Hosni Mubarak at the front and center among heads of state at a meeting in Washington, D.C., in September 2010, it was blogger Wael Khalil who discovered and blogged about it, further revealing the power of social media as a check on government press. The unaltered Associated Press photo showed President Obama leading, flanked by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, King Abdullah II of Jordan, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with Mubarak slightly behind the four on their way to a media event. Al-Ahram's editor stood by the doctored photo, saying it was meant to illustrate Mubarak's central position on the Palestinian issue.^{xiv} Blogs are independent voices, where the owners write and share their ideas exercising complete freedom of expression. Certainly the Internet helps niche groups of all types coalesce. As David Ignatius noted in a column in *The Washington Post*, quoting Charles McLean, the Internet can act as a "rage enabler," providing "instant, persistent, real-time stimuli [that] takes anger to a higher level."^{xv}

In the realm of propaganda and politically motivated communication, information warfare is declared before the actual war is waged and in present times, *Virtual War*, constructed through images, symbols, words, representation and omission, prepares the ground for the physical warfare. The reinforcing images of 9/11 incident provided much justification for the 'War on Terror' and the result being millions are rendered dead, injured, maimed or homeless.

After only U.S and China, India stands at third place in terms of internet usage. The situation has emerged during the last decade only due to rapid advancements in the ICTs and introduction of various internet-related services from broadband and LAN to GPRS, 2G and 3G. It can also be attributed to the revolution in the world of communications and information in terms of accessibility, technological know-how, and competition amongst the service providers to reach-out to the maximum that has encouraged a good proportion of the world population to utilize more and more communication channels. Another factor that has contributed in the popularization of new media is through 'media convergence,' which has diminished the barriers between different forms of media and resulted in an all-in-one form of media like internet, mobile phones. The mobile phones have become smart machines, which use the latest technology and perform all the operations, which is expected of New Media. The largest technological impact globally is coming from the mobile phone.^{xvi} GPRS and Internet is easily accessed from mobile phone handsets. Based on this pattern of access, the Internet and Mobile Association of India announced in November, 2011 that India's Internet population stands at 100 million.

The technology has reached the masses through this way. The popular activities include social networking, video-sharing, matrimonial matches, job search, entertainment sites and blogs. The recent hyped cycles of news media can also be attributed to multiple options offered through cross-ownership, which includes broadcast, print and online media. Major contemporary issues like Lokpal, 2G and 3G etc. have received much spotlight through this, not just from the original news producers, but from audiences at

large, who have emerged as producers themselves. These are addressed multi-dimensionally through blogging, twitter, facebook groups etc.

Similarly, Kashmir also advances towards facilitating the online zone, with its increasing users. The media industry of Jammu and Kashmir, especially Kashmir lacks good infrastructure. The majority of people have been using newspapers, radio and Television as the tools of mass communication. Due to the unrest during the last 3 decades, the growth of media has slowed down and it could not thrive normally. The introduction of New Media can be seen as relatively new as compared to the rest of India. There is less exposure to internet. However, Kashmir is also touched by globalization and its new generations are already familiar with computer and internet. Internet usage in Kashmir is also increasing like India and the world. But, it has slowly and steadily picked up during the last decade, when the internet services and mobile phone services were started in J&K. The last 5 years have seen tremendous increase in the number of internet users because of technological advancements and popularity of smart phones, almost all internet service providers operate here, providing users with a wide range of options to choose from. With novel technologies and facilities, the people began to surf more websites for long time (as now internet has become cheaper also). People of the valley that got exposed to internet mostly include the young generations especially students. They got access to a wide variety of websites like informational, educational, medical, business, social message sharing websites. These users are on the cyberspace and part of the globalized regime of communication. During the last few years, particularly because of the upsurge of unrest, Facebook and some local news portals became highly operative because of some curbs on the other media. Perhaps, this can be seen as linked to the global contemporary revolution in the manner of communication for e.g. the Jasmine Revolution, Egypt Uprising or Wall Street revolution. These comprise of both negative and positive impacts and since new media is newer and difficult to manage, lot is needed in terms of its control and management.

5. Concerns Raised by New Media: Harm Caused by the Rise of This Technology

Since the inception of information technology, various media watch groups and monitoring agencies and bodies have registered their fears which revolve round its usage. The sphere of influence is greater as compared to other media due to its unique nature, which allows more freedom from censorship and other barriers, greater speed, increased and uninterrupted access to the overflowing information. These characteristics, which were the USP or the unique selling proposition of this media, have turned against the society in general to a higher degree and certain vulnerable groups like youngsters etc. in particular. It has been often attributed to the differently perceived 'professionalism' of the cyber world to legislative failures pushing for a growing demand for Cyberethics and its implementation cannot be ignored. Persons who first used the phrase, *information ethics* included Robert Hauptman in who started the *Journal of information ethics* in 1992 and Rafael Capurro who wrote an article in German in 1988 in "Information ethos und Informations ethik"^{xvii}[Information Ethos and Information Ethics]. However, some the issues in information ethics were raised as early as 1980. Barbara J. Kostrewski and Charles Oppenheim wrote an article, "Ethics in Information Science" for the *Journal of information science*^{xviii} where they discussed such issues as the confidentiality of information, bias in information provided to clients or consumers, the quality of data supplied by online vendors, the use of work facilities, etc.^{xix}

Some of the broader highlighted apprehensions are:

- 5.1. No gatekeeping or monitoring of content:** it leads to uncontrollable rush of information which can incite religious sentiments, cause political disturbances or result in moral degradation like ‘Pornography’ is in the line of fire in this regard. The users are confounded by this technology that links together nearly half a billion people in ‘Worldwide Web’ - a global village -allowing instant, anonymous exchange of uncensored text and images. Anyone in this virtual-metropolis can put anything online, and once it is there, anyone can access it and we have a consequence in the form of *Cyberporn Panic*. The nature of human psychology is that over-indulgence in one pleasure creates a desire for another, more depraved pleasure, and so forth in a potentially unending downward spiral towards total degradation. In a nightmarish scenario, an upstanding gentleman could thus wake up to find himself on one of the web’s many sites explicitly dedicated to facilitating illicit activity. Thousands of sites offer 24/7 online gambling, and researchers say upwards of 15 million people visit these sites annually and leave several billion dollars of their family’s funds there.^{xx} Also, cases of defamation and image smear are easy through internet, example being Google Smear, which was started as a political tool in America.
- 5.2. Authenticity and credibility:** While it is difficult to ascertain the source of any content, the identity of the source can also be masqueraded as someone else. Even a large chunk of ‘citizen journalists’ working with this media and manning the various ‘New Media’ cannot claim the same experience, objectivity and credibility as a traditional print or electronic journalist. So their output often has a questionable objectivity and is looked upon as having the ‘third party credibility.’ As print and electronic media management cut staffs and reduced the size of the "news hole" to burnish profits, the strength and credibility of the "gate keepers" have weakened. If we talk about Kashmir, during the 2010 unrest, there was mushrooming of online news portals and social networking pages, which claimed to provide updates, most of which were later on blamed for ballooning of false information at times, like the ‘Quran Desecration’ episodes, which triggered violent incidents.
- 5.3. Vulnerability of Intellectual Property Rights:** Internet being the ‘Information Superhighway’ that it is, has led to the creation of an ocean of information and knowledge material. This has also paved way for the information theft in this virtual domain, where the intellectual property like the literature (articles, books, journals, periodicals etc.) is prone to plagiarism and other related issues. The Battle over Copyright on the Net (and Other Intellectual Property Encounters) is disturbing the literary circles to a great extent. We often hear about plagiarism and copied material, which is often used without proper permission or attribution.
- 5.4. Personal relationships:** In addition, it has also led to psychologically destructive relationships and creation of harmful ties. The virtual relationships have replaced the personal interactions leading to the depleting feelings of togetherness, family. Any form of technology- mobile phones, internet, IPods, Play Stations has created individuals within a family. Internet Dating, which is seen as a trend by youngsters has already given rise to various social and personal fiascos and disturbed the social institutions of family, marriage and community.
- 5.5. Right to privacy Vs. Right to Information:** While there is a growing demand for free-flow of information, especially about personal lives of celebrities, there are complaints about security and

privacy, which question their Civil Liberties. Cyberstalking is offshoot of the piercing nature of internet, where people have 'Someone to Watch Over them' quite often. Although, the growing desire of being famous and in spotlight is what drives these celebrities most of the times, but this tamed pet often gets out of control leading to spilling of the beans in the public domain.

5.6. Cyber Crimes: Over the last few years, there have been several infamous cases of abduction, rape and murder in which the victim was first approached and lured through a Chat or Multi-user domain sites, instant messaging or emails. A Cyber slum or the Net Slum is an illegal field was created as a sanctum for hackers, illegal characters, trash data, and similar unwanted/illegal cyber-stuff. It is inaccessible to regular players as well as to the administration of real world, making it an ideal hideout for those who would otherwise be banned from the game.^{xxi} Besides, hacking in the matters of money and accounts is an alarming indicator too.

5.7. Ill effects on psychology of children: It leads to early maturity among them. It can be regarded as a consequence of the lack of gatekeeping in internet and as a result, children and other such vulnerable groups are exposed to high degrees of uncontrollable content that triggers the disturbance of normal growth phase amongst them. Technology is available to them at a young age, when they cannot differentiate between what should be accessed and what should be avoided. This can also be a cause for juvenile computer crimes.

These are the harsh realities of cyber-street life. But as Rosalind (2004)^{xxii} argues, that technology and specifically information technology, does not simply influence culture and society, but rather is itself inherently cultural and social and that any reconciliation between technological change and community will come from 'connecting technological and social innovation.' And however, susceptible society may seem in the hands of this technology, it ultimately is a product of a human brain, which only can devise ways to control it and use for the larger benefit of society.

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