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11 Globalization and the New Media

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Provocative predictions follow new technologies like a shadow: Satellite television will usher in a global village. The Internet will transform broadcasting into narrowcasting. Well-known journalists and columnists will be able to communicate independently and profitably on the Web, no longer dependent on corporate MegaMedia to convey their insights to an interested audience.

In my view these prognostications are not without merit and are based on a relatively sophisticated understanding of changing technology, media economics, corporate strategies, and audience expectations. But they may well miss the mark because there are so many more ways to get it wrong than right. Furthermore, most scenarios for the future tend to highlight one change (such as the explosive growth of the World Wide Web or the dramatically declining cost of global communication) and assume that everything else will remain constant—a demonstrably flawed modeling strategy.

Skeptics are quick to point out incorrect predictions and ridicule the effort, often criticizing what they view as a naïve technological determinism.¹ I am inclined to encourage the speculation, however, precisely because I am a skeptic of technological determinism. The pace of change in the technologies of human communication is particularly rapid now. We are in the process of designing and building a global digital communications infrastructure. The architecture and cost structure of that global electronic grid is subject to human control and not determined unilaterally by the nature of the technology itself. So, to speculate about the “effects of technology” on news, news institutions, the role of the journalist, journalism economics, news flows, and possible changing public perceptions of the political realm is to think about how to design technology to serve human ends, a worthy enterprise indeed.²

Technology does not determine, but it can make a difference. New technologies are too often engineered to do what preceding technologies did. They just do it a little better, faster, or cheaper. As a result, failure to speculate short-changes imaginative thinking about new functions and opportunities, pre-

cludes arguments about the viability of alternative structures, and diminishes debate about the social value of evolving institutions.

Another shadow is following technical change—the economic self-interest of the major institutions profiting from existing technologies. Newspapers watch the evolution of news Web sites with pained fascination.³ Television network news executives track developments in cable and satellite programming the way gamblers follow results from the racetrack.⁴ They too are gamblers, and they understand that their corporate stake is at risk.⁵

Since 1998, when the previous edition of this volume was published, an outburst of scholarship on news and the new media has occurred. My informal monitoring of the new books in this field yielded a list of more than twenty-five full-length books and edited volumes devoted specifically to this issue.⁶ Given the informal character of the search, these titles may represent only a fraction of the new work in book form. Moreover, many if not most of the new general volumes and textbooks on journalism and news media will contain a chapter (usually the last one) discussing the new media. An electronic search in scholarly journals for work on new media and news generates about three hundred citations for the same period. Are there some convergent findings emerging in this fast-growing literature? In this chapter, I try to make the case that there are, starting with four hypothesized “positive” outcomes of the digital revolution that scholars have been struggling to understand.

Many analysts feel that the dynamism of the new media environment serves to (1) *engage*, (2) *inform*, and (3) *empower* the public to address issues in the public sphere better than “old” media do, and that the public sphere itself is becoming more (4) *global* in scope as the boundaries of the traditional nation state become less constraining. And, predictably, analysts point to at least two potentially “negative” outcomes: greater (1) *polarization* of public opinion and knowledge and a subtle increase in (2) *monopolization* of control of media enterprises.

Tallying Up the Digital Difference

In the developed world the Web has become a critical channel for the flow of news. The Pew Center for the People and the Press reports that 50 million people turn to the Internet for news in the United States on a typical day. Among broadband households, people are more likely to get news from the Internet (43 percent) than a local newspaper (38 percent), and among top 40 percent of heavy Web users in broadband households the Internet is the

primary news source (71 percent) compared to only 59 percent turning to TV news.⁷ Always-on broadband connections appear to be critical for Web-based news content to be defined more or less interchangeably with television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. And broadband adoption continues on a steep curve, growing 33 percent in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries in 2006.⁸ An equivalent impact in the developing world is likely to require another generation or two in the development of wireless and low cost access technologies.⁹ MIT's Nicholas Negroponte, for example, has developed a \$100 Web-oriented computer in a project called One Laptop per Child.¹⁰

But technical availability and even active use of the Web does not necessarily lead to changes in political knowledge and behavior. The earnest expectation that the new media might engage, inform, and empower citizens has met with a sobering modesty of empirical results. It may be that we are witnessing yet another example of what Robert Merton dubbed the "Matthew effect" after the biblical observation that it is so often the rich who get richer.¹¹ Those already interested and active in the public sphere are the most likely to take advantage of the new media to pursue their interests. The so-called NASCAR dads and soccer moms, for the most part, have other matters that come first. Among the many studies that come to this conclusion is Richard Davis's *Web of Politics*. Davis says that voters "will not become different people just because there are resources at their disposal to follow politics quite closely."¹² Pippa Norris uses the phrase "activating the active" to characterize the phenomenon in her more internationally focused study.¹³

David Tewksbury's research suggests that the Internet may have a negative rather than a positive effect on political knowledge. His study of news-seeking on the Internet reveals that rather than rely on the editorial judgment of broadcast and print journalists who use placement in time (broadcasting) and space (print) to signal journalistic importance of various stories, citizens use search engines and related techniques to find topics of special interest. As often as not, sports and celebrity trump political significance.¹⁴ Eszter Hargittai reminds us that the most popular news sites on the Web are not new institutions; rather, they are emblazoned with the logos of very large and very familiar media companies.¹⁵ Jared Waxman reports that 80 percent of Web visits are concentrated in a mere .5 percent of the sites available.¹⁶

Doris Graber posits that "media user empowerment" may be the major outcome of the interaction of new media and politics.¹⁷ Indeed, a greatly expanded menu of political thought and opinion confront the citizens, and

some ravenous activists dig in with gusto. Roza Tsagarousianou and colleagues document a fascinating set of case studies of "civic networking movements" in the United States and Europe.¹⁸ They conclude that for these activists, the participatory character of the Web really does facilitate a meaningful and effective electronic public sphere. Kevin Hill and John Hughes examined a large sample of UseNet discussions, chat rooms, and political Web sites and found a rich diversity of discussion, most of it quite civil, informative, and, at the time of their analysis, slightly leaning to the right.¹⁹ But political activists continue to represent a tiny minority of the citizenry. Perhaps that was true as well in the salons and coffeehouses of Europe that inspired Jürgen Habermas's notion of an active public sphere. In the end, Graber acknowledges, "While available food for political thought has grown . . . the appetite for it and the capacity to consume it remain limited."²⁰

On the negative effects side, especially the posited polarization effect, the evidence is quite convergent. Cass Sunstein's imaginings of an electronically segregated world in which different political and ethnic groups consume only news and information configured especially for them to reinforce their existing beliefs are false fantasies.²¹ The work of Kelly Garrett and Paul Resnick with the Pew Internet and American Life Project makes the strongest case. They combine survey and experimental research to reveal that although people do enjoy reinforcing existing beliefs, they do not avoid oppositional information. In fact, they may frequently seek it out to better understand the "other side's" arguments if only to refute them.²² Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis concur—the "Daily Me" is technically straightforward, but such an approach does not resonate well with human psychology. Citizens want to know what others know. Furthermore, they point out that the Web is never the only information source for citizens.²³ It may be that the polarization hypothesis resonates with analysts because it coincides with a more pervasive cycle of partisanship, particularly in American politics.²⁴

Finally on the monopolization hypothesis, we find a continuing concern among critical scholars that the number of megamedia conglomerates appears to be getting smaller despite a growth of media outlets. It is indeed ironic. The growth of new competitive media has made traditionally profitable old media very nervous and has led to binge conglomeratization. Ben Bagdikian makes the case dramatically. Writing in the 1980s he traced the fifty largest media companies that dominated the airwaves and newsstands and their interlocking boards of directors. Bagdikian raised questions about the diversity of news and public affairs they were likely to produce. His stunning finding in 2004 was that

large companies still dominated the media, but, instead of fifty, there were only five—Time Warner, News Corp., Disney, Viacom, and Bertelsmann.²⁵ The work of other scholars and the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism confirm this trend.²⁶ The ironic conclusion of careful analyses of actual news content diversity, however, is that although the ownership has changed, the news coverage for the most part has not. We have no evidence to date that conglomeratization has led to less diverse news coverage.²⁷

The Technology of Creating and Delivering News

Edward Jay Epstein in *News from Nowhere*, published in 1973, explained with considerable flourish and insight how the ungainly technologies of television news of that era affected how news got on the air. For example, he describes how the rollout of a new Boeing plane in “remote” Seattle, Washington, was difficult to cover on network newscasts based in New York because of the time needed to shoot and edit film and to fly it back to New York while it was still news. Naturally, this was the situation before electronic news gathering and satellites. Today instantaneous live coverage of news events virtually anywhere on the globe is routine. Furthermore, amateurs with video cameras and cell phone cameras can capture unfolding events and become news cameras for the world. The Rodney King video is but one example.

But what ultimately may be most disruptive to traditional news practice is that audience members may well take it upon themselves to decide what is news and not just provide the raw materials to the news professionals. YouTube.com and related video sharing sites are becoming particularly popular and influential. A widely circulated video of Sen. Conrad Burns of Montana sleeping during a congressional hearing important to the citizens of his home state, with “Happy Trails” musically enlivening the sound track (among several other well-captured miscues) may have contributed to his defeat in 2006. A mixture of amateur and professional commentaries and Op-Eds generally referred to as blogs (short for Weblog) further blur the line between professional and grassroots news and commentary. Attentive bloggers, for example, were credited with drawing attention to Mississippi senator Trent Lott’s insensitive racial remarks at a public gathering. They persisted until the issue caught on in the mainstream media and contributed to his resignation as majority leader. It is not unusual for journalists to cite the blogosphere and for bloggers to quote, critique, and sometimes repurpose traditional news text and video. Although concerns are expressed about how amateur journalists both inadver-

tently and purposefully violate various journalistic norms, most analysts have welcomed the development because do-it-yourself newscasting tends to supplement rather than replace mainstream news.²⁸

The traditional definition of a news marketplace was a newspaper-television-defined metropolitan area supplemented by weekly local newspapers and an occasional community cable television channel. That definition turns out to be a historical-technological artifact.²⁹ The definition of a communications “market,” as any politician or news professional will confirm, is an important political entity. Changes in the overlap (or lack thereof) between a political district and a commercial market could have profound political effects. Previous attempts have been made to use technology to break down the local programming monopolies. What plagued public-access cable television, for example, was that community programming was shown at a fixed time, available to only a small fraction of those who might be interested.³⁰ Furthermore, without a tradition of promotion or outreach, these programs attract little attention.³¹ The new digital options, such as podcasting and e-mail lists, however, permit communication unconstrained by the technical limitations of fixed-format broadcasting. Small audience and special interest programming can be provided on demand. In addition, viewers are free to pass along the digital video file to potentially interested friends and neighbors, as they would pass along a news clipping. The economics of capture and transmission do not necessarily require large audiences and commercial production values.³² What evidence do we have that the new digital media may succeed in stimulating special interest news and citizen communication even though their analog forebears may have failed? Evidence is tricky here; it is still early in the diffusion of technologies and in the evolution of their use. Enthusiasts and skeptics both have their assemblage of anecdotes. But some lessons might be drawn.

In research conducted at the MIT Media Lab, we posited that the early adopters of home computer technology, by dint of their technical interests and background, would have patterns of Web use systematically different from the large mass of midterm adopters as penetration rates increased (by all indications, quite quickly) from 30 percent to 60 percent of American homes.³³ So we recruited early Internet enthusiasts through local Internet service providers in two locations and matched them up with a special sample of friends, coworkers, and family who had heard about the Web but had not yet used it much at work or at home. We provided them with loaned laptop computers and modems and, with their permission, tracked their usage patterns and content predilections, which we then compared with our parallel early-adopter cohort.

Although the early adopters spent more time looking at Web sites and were more facile at making their Web browsers behave, we found to our surprise that their content tastes and usage patterns were not distinctly different from the novices. Both samples used the Web primarily for special interest information and entertainment seeking, not just monitoring some of the many mass media Web outlets. We concluded that the flexible and interactive nature of the Web is suited to an active style of information-seeking in contrast with the more passive "monitoring" of traditional print and broadcast news media. It is not technological determinism; rather, it is evidence that technologies interact in distinct ways with different domains of human curiosity and interest.

A similar field trial was conducted in Pennsylvania.³⁴ In that study researchers at Carnegie Mellon University found that the difficulty of adapting to new technology greatly limited Internet use, especially for older users. The teenagers, notably male teenagers, used the home-based personal computers provided by the experimenters six to ten times more often than their parents. This finding may not be generalizable, however. The study was based on high school students who brought computers home, but the parents had little incentive to experiment with the computers, and no peer support was provided for the older users. Nevertheless, the patterns of use for all subjects were similar to those in the MIT study. The interactive nature of the Web led even novice users to quite diverse subject matter. The researchers report that 55 percent of the Web sites hit were visited by only one user of the one hundred households participating, and only 10 percent of the Web pages viewed were visited by ten or more study participants.³⁵ Eszter Hargittai, who has been pursuing this question, makes a persuasive case that a "digital divide" dichotomy of access versus nonaccess to the Web is unhelpful and must be supplanted with a richer notion of digital literacy based on evolving behaviors rather than the simple presence of online laptops.³⁶

Journalistic experiments with community-oriented, small-scale news projects online have suffered many frustrating failures. Therefore, some skepticism is due, especially if the proposed system depends on sustained labor by volunteers. But earlier experiments on the Web promise new formats, new flexibility, indeed new definitions of what news could be, only part of which is derived from traditional media streams and formats. The new formats of news involve audience discussion and commentary not easily incorporated in the broadcast domain, and detailed coverage of specialized topics not ordinarily found outside of specialty magazines. Perhaps a fresh mixture of amateur enthusiasm and quasi-professional and fully professional journalism will produce a different definition of news and the economic model to sustain it.³⁷

The Changing Economics of the News Business

The spate of new books on the state of the fourth estate has a demonstrable tendency, first, to celebrate a golden age of Western journalism peaking in the recent past and, second, to decry the current and presumably evident decline of serious journalism.³⁸ Television, the new media, and the new media economics represent the usual suspects, the convenient *bête noire* as these narratives unfold. This critical perspective would probably be in evidence absent the invasion of new technologies, but it is nevertheless worthwhile to explore the logic of these inquiries.

Critiques of modern media resonate with three central themes: autonomy, format, and funding. The first theme is the need to protect the independence and unapologetic honesty of reporters and editors as they chronicle the issues and events that swirl around their employers' corporate empires. Expanding corporate cross-ownership, joint ventures, and ever-larger corporate command structures inevitably challenge that tradition of journalistic independence.³⁹ Numerous case studies of potential abuse circulate in the academic journals and professional trade press. From the media executives' point of view, the need to reduce the risk of new competitors and to control technology expenditures drives the merger mania. From the critic's point of view, these pressures have important unanticipated effects on journalistic integrity.⁴⁰

The second theme revolves around the evolution of news formats. In the newspaper world, the audience-research-derived model for *USA Today* is derided as McPaper. This format—short, simple, colorfully printed, with cute graphics and universally bland content—tastes best to the largest number of readers. But it is not necessarily nutritious. In television news, the growth during prime time of the magazine format mix of news and entertainment is a product of the competitive battle for viewership in a multichannel environment.⁴¹ It is decied as a sure sign of journalistic decline. The format's emphasis on soft news, personality, and celebrity allegedly weakens the tradition of hard-hitting serious journalism in the dinner-hour window for network news. Network news viewership is down, primarily as a result of the competition from cable and satellite entertainment programming.⁴²

The third and related theme is funding constraints—the pressure on print and broadcast news operations to be more efficient and to grow profits. During the 1990s media companies cut back on international travel, closed down foreign bureaus, placed new pressures on reportorial efficiency, and funded

fewer long-term and high-cost investigative assignments.⁴³ One might characterize the golden age of serious journalism as primarily a golden age of near-monopoly profits.⁴⁴

In the United States the three dominant networks used to draw in 90 percent of the viewing audience in prime time for entertainment programming. That audience share provided a healthy cushion in advertising revenues to support a high-profile and high-status news operation. In other industrialized nations during the 1990s, spectrum scarcity and government-sanctioned monopolies generated equivalently large audiences and (in commercial systems) profitable operations to support news programming. Metropolitan newspapers in the industrialized world, the medium of choice for regional retail advertising, also found themselves in a profitable position. Although some have argued that the pressures on the costs of quality journalism are primarily the outcome of a new management culture, the link of the evolving corporate norms in the news business to new competition and new media is in all likelihood highly significant.

How should we respond to the collision of new technology and the hard-won values of independent journalism? The playing field is divided between outrageous enthusiasts with roots in technology and capitalism and outraged critics with roots in cultural theory and the political left. The abandoned middle may prove to be the high ground here. It is important not to equate structural change with an abandonment of basic values or selling out. What are now the revered principles of the independent fourth estate were largely crafted by capitalists.⁴⁵ The most significant danger to independent journalism is capture by monopoly or oligopoly interests or, in this case, the recreation of artificial scarcity. American academics and news professionals have dominated the dialogue thus far. European, especially Scandinavian, media have different editorial traditions—political party-based and more ideologically oriented. Will the new media offer a new lease on life to these traditions or instead reflect an Americanization and commercialization of news practices around the world, as many fear?⁴⁶

One of the defining characteristics of the critical literature is a concern about pandering to the lowest common denominator. The electronic media give rise to instantaneous and two-way communication. Unlike magazines and newspapers, what people like and dislike is immediately apparent. They like the local, the visual, the human perspective, the concrete example; they dislike abstract political rhetoric and institutional perspectives. The mass audience's proclivity is well known but not necessarily well understood. For good or for

ill, the ratings game of today's television programming will intensify in the next generation of digital video. Consider it a challenge to research-based professional creativity rather than a test of ethical and political will.

The Global Village

Some of the most stimulating speculation on the impact of new media on news centers on the potential "death of distance."⁴⁷ Walter Lippmann's 1922 classic, *Public Opinion*, is an examination of the public's understanding of distant events, in that case Americans' perceptions of the Great War in Europe.⁴⁸ In his own way, Lippmann introduced the globalization issue. He puzzled over how Americans could be expected to make sense of such structurally complex events half a world away and in such unfamiliar contexts. Undersea cables connected Europe and North America by the time of the First World War, so up-to-date telegraphic reports from the battlefields were featured in the newspapers of the day. But radio was not yet in common use, and television and satellites were a long way off. Lippmann's book is still frequently assigned in classrooms, even after Vietnam, the first televised war, and the Gulf War, the first war televised live. The questions he raised are no less relevant today than they were when *Public Opinion* was first published.

There are indeed increased flows of news across international boundaries through satellites, data networks, and the interconnection of new and traditional news media.⁴⁹ The United States may be a world leader in new technology, but it exhibits the lowest levels of foreign news content in its media and the lowest levels of foreign news interest and foreign news knowledge among the publics of industrialized nations. Is there evidence that the increasing global media flows may nudge public opinion toward a new worldliness? The answer would have to be: not yet. Electronic connectedness cannot be equated with global interest, attention, and most important, understanding.

The quadrennial—now biennial—survey of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations consistently reveals that only one-third of Americans express interest in news about other countries.⁵⁰ The Pew Center studies of news interest also reveal an unchanging disinterest in international political news, a pattern especially pronounced among young U.S. citizens. Only one person in ten under thirty years of age follows such events closely.⁵¹

But the digital day is young. Although it is trumpeted that CNN is available in nearly one hundred nations around the world (a fact acknowledged by those world travelers who stay in the better hotels), CNN has not yet reached a

penetration of 1 percent of the world's population despite the wide availability of cable in Europe, North America, and Japan.⁵² In the industrialized world it took nearly seventy-five years for the telephone to reach near universal penetration.⁵³ Although the diffusion of new media is moving more quickly, it is too early for a definitive assessment.

The technical drivers of this diffusion are, as before, relatively straightforward. The migration to electronic communications has prompted a robust international competition among undersea optical-fiber cables, satellite transmission companies, and, to a lesser extent, terrestrial microwave networks. The technical challenge is to get greater amounts of information through an existing infrastructure while new and even more sophisticated electronic links are constructed. Such are the tests by which capitalism demonstrates its vitality. There are numerous competitors, each with a legacy in the traditional communication industries, invested in digital networks desperately looking for business.⁵⁴ The prices of international voice, video, and data are dropping dramatically. The lower costs become evident to the average consumer in international long-distance telephone rates.⁵⁵ The pervasive impact of lower costs is also seen in the greater flow of financial data, international news, and entertainment programming across international boundaries.

But cost is only part of the picture. As massive flows of digital communication surge across national boundaries, patrolling and protecting political boundaries becomes more difficult.⁵⁶ A truckload of news magazines at a border crossing is easy to identify and, if necessary, to seize. In earlier eras those few broadcasts that spanned borders could be jammed if found to be politically offensive.⁵⁷ But how is it possible to police the Internet? Some authoritarian regimes around the world will doubtlessly hunt down an offending Web site or impolitic e-mail message, and the offenders will be pilloried with appropriate ceremony. The pretense of control will be resolutely proclaimed, but in truth the authorities of the industrialized nations are losing the capacity to censor or even to monitor the internal and international communications of their citizenry. The Chinese experimentation with an economically vibrant but politically muted Internet is a closely watched case study.⁵⁸ It is simply impossible to monitor every electronic utterance. With a few keystrokes on a personal computer, citizens can encrypt messages, resulting in a digital stream that would call for months of analysis engaging banks of government supercomputers to decrypt (if the authorities could find the digital fragment in the first place).⁵⁹

Because the Internet blurs the distinction between an interpersonal and a broadcast communication network, it blurs the distinction between private and

public speech. Authoritarian nations' restrictive regulations, designed to prevent speech deemed contrary to national security, focus on mobilization appeals and incitement-to-riot concepts of public speech. A rabble-rouser on a street corner with a bullhorn is, by definition, easier to locate and silence than, say, a thoughtful but anonymous critic at a computer terminal.

Have the new media nurtured a global village? Not yet. The new media make such a phenomenon possible. But in the post-9/11 world, a lot will have to evolve in the beliefs and behaviors of the world's citizenry before the village metaphor even begins to fit. Hill and Hughes point to the newsgroup, *alt.politics.French*, which appears to be a forum for hurtling insults back and forth across the English channel between the British and the French.⁶⁰ Al Jazeera has used direct satellite broadcasting with great effect and some profit by vilifying Israel and to some extent the West in general for an attentive Arab viewership.⁶¹ As Jonathan Zittrain points out, the nation state, if it chooses to, can exert significant control over the content of the Internet and broadcast channels, even satellite broadcasts.⁶²

The Public Sphere

In authoritarian media systems the official line of public rhetoric is often viewed with appropriate skepticism. There is a long-standing tradition of sophisticated audience members reading between the lines to catch subtle changes in policy and strategy. One could point to numerous examples when officially decreed falsehoods are widely understood by the public to be lies and sometimes are even freely acknowledged so in private discussion.⁶³ This rich dynamic between the official and grassroots public sphere is what Jürgen Habermas focused on in his celebration of nineteenth-century salon society in Europe.⁶⁴ By most measures, the evolving media, including talk radio and especially the Internet, have the ability to energize that tradition of a vibrant public sphere. The critical literature in mass communications research argued for decades that the rhetoric of official news obscured the links between public policy and the daily circumstances of private life. We may expect that the dominant public language of the media will continue to interact with the private language of the street. But if, as predicted, the new media truly enhance small group communication, new forms of private speech will migrate forcefully from the street into the surviving mass media. The new media are still young additions to the global institutional complex. Despite numerous constraints, a virtuous circle of political progress is still possible. Modest expectations and a

knowing reliance on activists and not just the mass public may yet generate some interesting new models.⁶⁵

Michael Schudson's study of the evolution of the American news industry has, like Lippmann's study, become a classic and is widely used in teaching journalism, press politics, and public opinion.⁶⁶ It is a book with a message, especially for young readers who grew up with mass mediated news and may think they know what news is. It is, Schudson demonstrates powerfully, a socially constructed phenomenon. The idealized objectivity of the fourth estate has its roots in the economics of newspaper competition at the beginning of the twentieth century. And, as a socially, politically, and economically constructed phenomenon, the definition of news may yet evolve further in response to future needs and future incentives.

Professional journalists squinting ahead at the news industry's economics, technologies, and competition may be inclined to circle the wagons to protect old principles and old ways of doing business. Indeed, they have much of value to protect. But in times of dramatic change, there also is an opportunity to affect the definition of news in positive ways, to explore the subtle dynamics of public and private speech in other ways, to examine policy agendas in more depth, and to discover different news communities. Judging from recent history, we have reason to expect that digital news will be much more than yesterday's headlines on a computer screen.

The Bottom Line

We have reviewed four hypothesized positive outcomes of the digital revolution found in the recent literature. Although scholars have eagerly sought out evidence that the new media may serve to *engage, inform, and empower* the public to address issues in the public sphere, the evidence is sparse and in some cases negative. It is also argued that the public sphere is expanding—becoming *global* in scope as the boundaries of the traditional nation state are less constraining. Here the evidence is stronger, but it is still too early in the game to draw a firm conclusion. Among the potentially negative outcomes, such as greater *polarization* of public opinion and knowledge around a self-filtered “Daily Me,” we find that research thus far contradicts the hypothesis, as people prefer to keep tabs on both sides of most issues. And the concern about the growth in *monopolization* of media by a shrinking number of media conglomerates is indeed evident in the literature, but surprisingly has not manifested itself in less diverse content, at least not yet. The monopolization-megamedia

issue has been a continuing concern for many decades and is likely to be resolved, if at all, by policy and political decisions independent of the character of the new technical media themselves.

The real bottom line is the explosion of new media information sources and the much-expanded menu of ideas and opinions about public affairs when the Internet is close at hand. But for the most part, the public uses its newfound freedom of choice to seek out entertainment rather than civic edification. It is a familiar pattern in the development of new media. Those who already have an interest in and knowledge about public affairs are those most likely to take advantage of new resources. As a result, any “effects” of the new media tend not to be very dramatic; rather, they are highly constrained by psychological, cultural, and economic forces—phenomena we were just beginning to understand as we struggled to make sense of the “old media.”

Notes

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Second Edition

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