Chapter 27
Comparative Approaches of the IGI–Global Collection

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ABSTRACT

This volume has surveyed a broad swath of the impacts of what is one of the largest technological transformations in human history, the Internet. The Internet has changed the way people communicate: among their friends and families, at school and work, and how they meet new people, within and across cultures. It has changed how companies conduct their business, and refocused many new companies on the business possibilities of the Internet itself, which despite the temporary bust in a number of dot.com businesses at the end of the 1990s, continues to expand with relatively long standing businesses like Amazon and Apple doing extremely well. Furthermore, new businesses like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp are growing fast, becoming dominant in niches that were not imaginable 20 years ago.

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL VIEWS

This volume has surveyed a broad swath of the impacts of what is one of the largest technological transformations in human history, the Internet. The Internet has changed the way people communicate: among their friends and families, at school and work, and how they meet new people, within and across cultures. It has changed how companies conduct their business, and refocused many new companies on the business possibilities of the Internet itself, despite the temporary bust in a number of dot.com businesses at the end of the 1990s, the internet industries continues to expand with relatively long standing businesses like Amazon and Apple doing extremely well. Furthermore, new businesses like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp are growing fast, becoming dominant in niches that were not imaginable 20 years ago.

The facilitation of international business, both among traditional and new companies, is also a key feature of the Internet. Just to give a historical contrast, in the mid–to-late 1980s, the lead author

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8740-0.ch027
of this essay, Straubhaar, did both academic work and consulting on how large companies that were users of telecom and computer services could expand their electronic communications before the Internet as we know it. Simply to create corporate email services, update financial results, keep track of inventory, maintain central records on personnel, etc. required companies to have their own computer servers in regional hubs and connect them with leased high-speed telecom lines at high prices from monopoly PTT providers. The Internet now allows them to do all of these things, at much higher speed, at infinitely lower costs. Whereas telecom and computing costs were a huge barrier to entry into international business in the 1980s (Porter, 2008), the low costs of the Internet are now an incentive to new entrants to expand their businesses transnationally, expanding the boundaries for new services, new business leads and different markets (Doyle, 2013).

Passarelli notes in her opening essay how the Internet linked to education has been expanding its possibilities and maximizing results, carrying with its virtual endless connections between the knowledge and the ability to solve problems in all parts of the world. It has also transformed the way that we entertain ourselves, initially in music, where it has had perhaps its climax of impact, but also increasingly in television, film, gaming, and the new Internet based services like social networks, which are the main focus of entertainment for many users, with other forms of entertainment embedded in those social networks as links to news stories, television shows and clips, user made videos, music, blogs, etc.

This volume has many themes and most of the essays touch on several themes. Probably the most frequent and important, represented as headings in this essay are digital or information literacy, convergence in several senses of the word, user behavior, digital inclusion, and policy.

DIGITAL OR INFORMATION LITERACY

Since the late 1990s, Literacy has drawn enormous attention in the broader field of communication, media and technology studies (e.g., Christ & Potter, 1998; Tyner, 1998). This word connotes a robust research approach as it not only “covers the interpretation of all complex, mediated symbolic texts broadcast or published on electronic communication networks”, but also “foregrounds the technological, cultural, and historical specificity of particular media as used in particular time and places” (Livingston, 2004; p.3). Therefore, with various research interests and focus, scholars in this field have proposed a constellation of terms—including media literacy, information literacy, game literacy, etc.—to measure and analyze the use pattern of specific platforms (e.g., Jenkins, Puroshotma, Clinton, Weigel & Robison, 2009; Livingston, 2004, 2008a, 2008b; Livingston, Bober & Helsper, 2005). Digital literacy, which usually encompasses (or turns out interchangeable with) the terms like Internet literacy and computer literacy, is introduced in line with the rapid diffusion of computer along with the pervasiveness of Internet-mediated activities. Provided such a context, scholars have engaged in leveraging this term to precisely gauge and generalize to what extent people are skilled in using digital technologies in relation to their real-life situations (e.g., Hargittai, 2005, 2009). More to this point, Buckingham (2006, 2007) contends that the notion of digital literacy should not be preoccupied with a functional matter of harnessing computer & Internet skills; rather, especially for young people, it should cater to the agendas that are “typically ignored or marginalized in thinking about technology in education—and particularly in the school subject of ICT” (2006; p.274). In a similar vein, Sonck, Livingston, Kuiper, and Haan (2011)