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Trends. Politics and Cyberpsychology

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The introduction of new mass media for use by individuals and groups beyond the political elite has often been associated with political change. Although these media can be and have been used to nurture totalitarianism, autarky, oligarchy, and plutocracy, one might also point to examples wherein they nurtured representative democracy. What political change might be in the winds with the continual expansion of the Internet?

According to the current self- and other-appointed experts, the sky's the limit in both the expansive and constraining sense of this idiom. Some posit one homogenized political culture that can vary towards an infinite number of political consequences. Some posit an infinite number of consequences via the route of customized, heterogeneous, and even singly unique political cultures. Other experts focus not on the Internet's putative growth and self-liberating opportunities via access to information for each individual but instead on the opportunities to be controlled by others through access to such information. Still other experts posit that governments and other political entities will be able to influence people in a premeditated manner, while additional experts advocate that intrinsic properties of the Internet will prove recalcitrant to any influence attempt. Finally, a case is sometimes made that before the political consequences of the Internet become clear--assuming they can become clear (which isn't clear to some experts while the impossibility of clearness is quite clear to others)--yet another mass media change will be in the works.

Besides that of cyber-enablement--i.e., the giving of employment opportunities and notoriety to mass media experts and those who study them--is there any other valid conclusion that can be offered about the political consequences of cyberpsychology? (See Bimber, B. (1998). The Internet and political mobilization: Research note on the 1996 election season. Social Science Computer Review, 16, 391-401; King, S.A. (1999). Internet gambling and pornography: Illustrative examples of the psychological consequences of communication anarchy. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 2, 175-193; Lessig, L. (2000). Code and other laws of cyberspace. Basic Books; Shapiro, A. (2000). The control revolution: How the Internet is putting individuals in charge and changing the world we know. Public Affairs; Sunstein, C. (2001). Republic.com. Princeton University Press; Vincelli, F. (1999). From imagination to virtual reality: The future of clinical psychology. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 2, 241-248; Wheeler, D.L. (1998). Global culture or culture clash: New information technologies in the Islamic world--A view from Kuwait. Communication Research, 25, 359-376.) (Keywords: Cyberpsychology, Internet, Media, Social Change.)

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