

PROBLEMATIZING CYBER CULTURE

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Abstract

Cyber culture is the most recent signifying system through which essentially novel experiences are constructed and communicated, accessed and reproduced. Cyber culture emerges from the pervasive impact of the Internet on computer technologies. Several radical innovations in information and communication systems have changed human life beyond imagination. The conventional dichotomy between the real and the virtual has become redundant with the evolution of cyber culture. The article is a moderate attempt to theorize cyber culture as a discourse where epistemological and ideological structures intersect. Cyber culture has transformed the concepts of subjectivity and identity on the one hand and epistemology and pedagogy on the other. The author explains key words like cyber space, cyber culture, virtual reality, the technosocial, virtual community, online identity, cyber subjectivity, cyber power, virtual politics and so on.

Problematizing Cyber Culture

The advent of technologies has enhanced the management of information and communication systems. These systems have become a lifestyle, a way of doing things simply and conveniently. Dynamic interactions have become increasingly possible online. Individuals from different time zones interact on a topic following a “thread.” Online games and electronic dating are commonplace. The advent of blogs and online journals help individuals to create and recreate online identities. These portals allow people of common interest to come together and promote group interests based on information mutually shared. All these functions take place within “cyber space.” Cyber space is also the platform for online libraries, e-books, e-journals, e-book store, online teaching, virtual teaching, multimedia teaching, podcasts, social network sites and pedagogies like Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Web Enhanced Language Learning (WELL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). Cyber culture provides unlimited digital space with ever increasing possibilities of expression, representation and interaction. But it is monitored in a panoptic surveillance through digital protocols.

The Internet

The Internet came into view in the 1960s. It was an innovation of the Department of Defense of the US. The Internet was constructed as a global computer based “network of networks.” In the US the evolution of the Internet was first reflected in the introduction of the Web, popularly known as World Wide Web. The Web introduces simple user friendly interface with file transfer protocols. This technological breakthrough has made simple the navigation around the Net. The innovation of the Internet resulted in unprecedented commercial success which includes the establishment of Internet service providers like America Online (AOL) and CompuServe. In this regard, David B. Whittle (1997) comments: “The pioneers, settlers and squatters of the virgin territories of cyber space have divided some of that land into plots of social order and plowed it into furrows of discipline-for the simple reason that is natural resources can only be found in the mind and have great value if shared” (420). Whittle compares cyber space to cultivable land and the Internet to natural resources. He emphasizes the sharing of the Internet as a means of structuring society based on values. Whittle points to the impact of the Internet on human life in near future.

Cyber Space

The word cyber space was coined by William Gibson in his epoch making novel *Neuromancer* (1984). He refers to cyber space as “a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity” (51). Cyber Space is viewed as a new frontier of digital information. It defies geographic space and time zones. Cyber space has a spatio-temporal mobility difficult to imagine. People from different time zones and different geographical space interact with one another in real time on the cyber space.

Cyber space is related to un-surpassing speed with which information is accessed and distributed. Cyber space is therefore interchangeably used with *information superhighway*, which defines the unimaginable speed with which communication and information are exchanged. In this context, Al Gore remarks in the inaugural address at the World Telecommunication Development Conference (1994):

These highways - or, more accurately, networks of distributed intelligence - will allow us to share information, to connect, and to communicate as a global community. From these connections we will derive robust and sustainable economic progress, strong democracies, better solutions to global and local environmental challenges, improved health care, and - ultimately - a greater sense of shared stewardship of our small planet.

There is an unprecedented interaction among people from all walks of life, writers, scholars students, housewives and even laymen. The people who engage in this type of interactionism are called techno futurists by Andy Hawks (1993). Politicians like Al Gore look forward to cyber space as a site for democratic participation and equality of opportunities. In this regard, David Silver (2000) also observes that cyber space is a new frontier fostering democratic interaction and reducing social and economic inequities. He also observes that though cyber space lacks geographical boundaries, it offers context for the construction of collective and individual identities. Theorists like Louis Rosetto and Rosanne Stone underline the social, economic and political dimensions of cyber space. Rosetto compares cyber space to “a new economy, a new

counterculture and beyond politics” (Cited in Mogel 79). He points to the political economy and the resistance potential of cyber space. Stone defines cyber space as “incontrovertibly social spaces in which people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of both ‘meet’ and ‘face’” (Cited in Jones 19). She also endorses the potential of cyber space as a site where identities are (re)constructed. This is made possible with the elastic qualities of the Internet with its constant transformation, reinvention and innovation. In this regard, Rosetto observes that “a new culture has risen” which the cyber culture theorists call “future culture” (Hawks 1993). They point to a future where materiality of culture is seriously challenged.

Cyber Culture

Cyber culture is generally identified with a pervasive use of its various byproducts. It is usually identified as the culture that has emerged with the advent of technologies made possible through the application of the Internet. Cyber culture is so vast that it can be understood only by verifying its dimensions. Silver (1996-97) also observes that cyber culture is difficult to define and is understood as “broad, deep and in constant state of flux.” He further emphasizes that it is easier to put forth “a number of dimensions of cyber culture than a single definition of it.” Silver states that it is “broad” for it does not thrive only within the context of the Internet. It is “a network of networks” and is also created by online identities which make possible the interactions of individuals who remain online. The different types of social interactions that occur online include basic email, newsgroups, Multi User Domains (MUDs), electronic chat rooms and World Wide Web (WWW) which allow online interactions. Silver argues that it is “deep” as it is often “a product of complex and collaborative communicative practices which takes place in varying segments of time and space” (1996-97). The different types of social interactions that occur within the Web provide opportunities for collaboration which in turn develops the creation of online communities. The concept of online or virtual communities is an integral part of cyber culture. Silver also states that it is “in a constant state of flux” since it evolves through time like material culture. But the evolution takes place at a more rapid pace in keeping with the innovation of technologies. As in the case of culture, the descriptions, perceptions and theories used to define and study cyber culture continually evolve in real time. Therefore no boundaries can be drawn to the limit of cyber culture either in space or in time.

Like culture, cyber culture is also laden with subversive, oppositional, alternative and resisting characteristics. Mark Dery (1994) therefore defines cyber culture enumerating its various qualities and divisible sites: “A far flung, loosely knit, complex of sublegitimate, alternative and oppositional subcultures whose common project is the subversive use of techno-commodities often framed by radical body politics . . . Cyber culture is divisible into several major territories; visionary technology, fringe science, avant-garde art, and pop culture” (19). It consists of a variety of digital visual media, introducing an infinitely mystified virtual world. The virtual world creates a technology simulated make belief reality called virtual reality constructed in the luminal space of computer called virtual space.

Cyber culture originates from the idea of information culture. Andy Hawks (1993) argues that the prefix cyber refers to information. He argues that information is the most important commodity in cyber culture. This is evident in the relative prominence of televisual cultures circulated by CNN, MTV and similar producers of popular channels. The genre of science fiction is popularized through cyber culture in the concept of cyberpunks, now popularly known as

hackers. The term cyberpunk literally means a person using “technology and information in ways that deviate from the expected norms and laws of society” (Hawks 1993). Following the cue from the concept of cyber culture as information culture, the cyberpunk movement advances the argument that “information wants to be free.” The cyberpunk creates a space in which information can be readily accessed and shared in “varying segments of time.” In this context, Hawks remarks:

Cyber culture is probably is most closely associated with the idea of future culture, yet cyber culture is often mis-and over-used. If you look at the meaning of the word ‘cyber,’ basically ‘information’ in an oversimplified context, it has little to do with frequently-used notions of cyber culture, specifically a Gibson-esque cyberpunk world as it exists today or in near future. (Hawks 1993)

Hawks takes the position that equating “cyber” to information is only an oversimplified explanation. It really refers to the kind of cyberpunk produced in *Neuromancer*. In this regard, he also cites the example of the post World War II context in which the world has radically changed through the use or abuse of war technology. Hawks also refers to the postmodern context in which technology is pivotal in the production of information as a commodity with exchange value: “Postmodernism accepts the reality of a post-industrial world moving towards an information-based world” (Hawks 1993). The postmodern context only emphasizes the importance of information as a commodity that demands classification as exchange knowledge. Cyber culture revolves around the concept of the Internet and the things that constantly take place within cyber space (Silver 1996-97). Thus a collection of cultures and cultural products that exist and are produced with the Internet is called cyber culture.

Cyber Culture Studies

Cyber Culture Studies is an emerging discipline which has influenced almost all other disciplines. The major domains of Cyber Culture Studies are:

1. Sociological studies of the uses, users and impacts of and on new technologies like mapping the social effects of cyber space.
2. Psychological impacts of cyber space involving key interests in online identity, community and communication.
3. Studies of creative and applied arts intersecting with new technologies, and studies of the aesthetics of new technologies.
4. Literary theories and studies like science fiction, cyber punk, digital narratives and e-fiction/poems.
5. Linguistic research into the language of new technologies and their users.
6. Studies on new media, multimedia/digital media, and film studies on sci-fi cinema, digital filmmaking, and new modes of film production, distribution and consumption.
7. Feminist studies involving cyber feminism and cyborg feminisms.
8. Philosophy of science and technology and theories on cyber space and cyber culture.
9. Approaches to understanding cyber cultural forms, practices, politics and identities, and also cyber cultural production and consumption.

Future Culture

Hawks associates cyber culture to the whole concept of “techno culture.” By “techno culture” he means what he refers to as “future culture,” the “here-and-now reality” that occurs in real time. Any discussion of cyber culture is related to the at once technological and sociological revolution of the Internet. Hawks argues that cyber culture has evolved in the context of technological and sociological subcultures. He has likened the technological subcultures to soap bubbles blown by children. The bubbles, diverse in size and shape, spin, rotate and float in the air or join together to form a new bubble, but finally pop leaving the residues on the ground. Hawks argues that the evolution of technological subcultures related to cyber culture has a similar origin and telos. He explains: “. . . subcultures combined into cultures or bigger subcultures (it’s all relative), subcultures may self destruct, they may evolve or morph, they may diverge in a separate direction. But whatever the case, there’s still bubbles because we, as a global village, are like the five year old-entrenched in the world of bubbles, looking on with wide eyes” (1993). Hawks emphasizes that cyber culture can be described and illustrated only in the context of evolving subcultures. Cyber culture is in a continuous process “with an infinite amount of ebb and flow between and among subcultures” (Hawks 1993). Cyber culture never loses its identity but morphs and combines with other technologies and byproducts having a “synergetic effect” (Hawks 1993). Hawks means that cyber identities are never completely erased but only transformed by emerging technologies and byproducts.

Cyber culture is referred to as techno culture since it is simulated by technology, television, computers and the Internet. The virtual world created by cyber culture exists in real time and can be accessed through the Internet. The changes that take place in the domain of cyber culture are non-linear, non-chronological and often cyclic. The changes take place in real time and sometimes before our eyes. The lightening speed with which changes take place makes Hawks to refer to cyber culture as future culture. He explains:

Future culture represents an internal and external effort, both passive and interactive, observational and participatory, to: discover these trends/ideas/objects or at least bring acknowledgement of their existence to a larger segment of the global populous, provide an interactive forum for the global populous, to discuss such matters and to reflect and refract varying cultures and subcultures, to then apply this discussion to existing cultures and subcultures to plant the seeds spawning further trends/ideas/objects. (1993)

He points to the interactive and participatory nature of the development of cyber culture and its cyclic growth: how a set of trends, ideas and objects gives way to new set of trends, ideas and objects through the interaction of global population.

The Technosocial

The technosocial is a concept that emerges from cyber culture discourses. Arturo Escobar has formulated the “techno-bio-cultural” bringing in elements of technology, the humans and the social structures within which the human technology interactions takes place. The fascination with the exploration of “the social world of virtual realities” leads to the way people experience the virtual worlds. In his essay “Welcome to Cyberia” (1996), Escobar observes: “Some researchers . . . assert that nature and machines have become important actors in the historical

processes that determine technological change” (Bell and Kennedy). Langdon Winner (1993) also expresses his views of techno-scientific communities from an anthropological perspective. He argues that human sciences “help orient our understanding of the place of technology in human affairs” (364). But Escobar rejects the formulation of a cause and effect relationship between technology and human realities. He calls for a new approach to the understanding of the technosociality. According to him, it is the “constitution of a new order . . . through the transformation of the range of possibilities for communicating, working, and being” (214). Celso Alvarez (1992) resonates with Escobar’s ideas of the technosocial, especially in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). He classifies three different contexts that constitute the technosocial in CMC. They are:

- (a) The relationship between machines and social subjects as producers of discourse at the threshold of the birth of an international “cyber literate” society.
- (b) The question of creation and distribution of and access to the “authorized” or “legitimate” CMC codes and languages whose mastery and manipulation grant particular groups of practitioners symbolic authority and control over the circulation of cyber culture.
- (c) The role of CMC in establishing links between, giving cohesion to, and creating continuities in the interaction history of group members. (Cited in Escobar 219)

The technosocial situations take into account technologically mediated social orders and these form the locus of cyber culture discourses. Alvarez identifies more and more social orders built through the hybrid relation between physically co-located and electronically mediated information systems. Cyborg reading practices and innovations in World Wide Web have transformed transdisciplinary discursive practices.

Virtual Communities and Online Identities

The discussion on the Internet constitutes what is generally accepted as popular cyber culture. According to Silver, popular cyber culture is the first stage of cyber culture. It proceeds to the second stage or the second generation called cyber culture studies. Virtual communities and online identities are “two pillars” of cyber culture studies (Silver 2000). The virtual communities constitute people who meet online and interact. Online identities are constructed when individuals or groups articulate their self/selves in the cyber space. These are the identities of virtual communities and therefore the two are interrelated.

Howard Rheingold (1993) defines virtual communities as a group of people who may or may not meet one another face to face but exchange words or ideas through mediation of computer bulletin boards or networks. He explains: “We temporarily have access to a tool that could bring conviviality and understanding into our lives and might help revitalize the public sphere. The same tool improperly controlled and wielded, could become an instrument of tyranny” (376). Rheingold points to what critics refer to as “negative utopia” where the Internet can be misused as a tool to perpetuate adverse effects of power as in terrorism. The Net has become a “haven of terrorism,” the Web has been appropriated to convey information related to terror, advance the course of terrorism and even to harbour terrorists with pseudo online identities.

Rosanne Stone defines virtual community in the context of cyber space. She defines virtual community as a group of people who “meet” in the cyber space. They may belong to different time zones and different geographic space (Jones 19). But they exchange ideas in real time and in cyber space. The level of interaction of the virtual communities is collective which at the level of offline reality can be called neighbourhood. Such neighbourhood is possible among the virtual communities, a neighbourhood without actual geographical space. Online communities can even lead to the offline meeting of its members.

Barry Wellman (1997) refers to virtual communities as “mechanisms of ‘social networks.’” The functioning of these communities can be explained in terms of the interactionist theories of Kollok and Smith (1996) or the collective action dilemma theory of Smith and Kollok (1998). Sherry Turkle explores the behavior of individuals in virtual communities and the construction of online identities. In her work *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of Internet* (1997), Turkle illustrates how online identities are constructed through virtual environments. She observes that some users abuse cyber space to repress their true or offline identity; they create online identities with a different set of characteristics, values and beliefs which can be entirely different from that of their real identities. She also finds that some users explore the Internet to navigate their offline lives. In such contexts, online identities can be extension of offline lives. She refers to the case of Ava, a college student who lost her leg in a car accident. Ava created a one legged character online and served for other persons with disabilities to get together, share experiences and eventually even find romance. In this context, Turkle reverses the caution that Rheingold suggests in the use of online identities. She displays an air of optimism that the Internet can potentially become a tool for empowerment.

The individual user who enters the cyber space constructs an online identity and assumes an “individual space.” Later this individual user meets other online identities. They share ideas and later discover other online identities. In this way they constitute an online “neighbourhood” which has no geographic space. These online identities are called virtual communities. Thus individuals are the fundamental cause of virtual communities. But Tim Jordan (1999) argues that the emergence of virtual communities shows that “the individual is no longer the final cause of online life” (62). The individuals consist of the virtual communities, but the online communities set conditions in which the “individuality” of online identities is defined. Thus, the collective become the fundamental cause of the individuals. So Jordan argues that the relationship between online identities and virtual communities is interchangeable. In other words, there is an inversion of relationship between the two.

The Dialectic between Virtual Reality and Physical Reality

The distinction between Virtual Reality (VR) and Real Life (RL) is central to cyber culture discourse. The binary between VR and RL suggests that the experiences related to the texts in the digital spaces of the Internet are external to physical reality and dissociated with material or real practices. The binary of VR and RL is therefore abandoned in favour of the dialectic between Virtual Reality/Physical Reality. This is an epoch making change in recent cyber culture studies.

Sherry Turkle (1997) has made an ethnographic study of the use of cyber space. She has explored this dialectic in her study of the users engrossed in text based virtual reality provided by MUD platforms. She finds that the users discover metaphorical ways of navigating through both

the virtual world and the physical world, rejecting any hard and fast line between them in everyday practices. She illustrates how the metaphors or indicators of one system can be used to describe the other, forming rational, emotional and attributive links between the two worlds. Turkle explains:

Even the operating system on the computers they used to play game, to draw and to write, carries the message. A computer's "Windows" has become a potent metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple and distributed system. The hypertext links have become a metaphor for a multiplicity of perspectives. On the Internet, people who participate in virtual communities may be "logged on" to several of them (open as several open-screen windows) as they pursue other activities. In this way, they may come to experience their lives as a . . . "cycling through" screen worlds in which they may be expressing different aspects of the self. (34)

According to Turkle, the experience of the users is not a fantasy. The interaction taking place on the MUD platforms is not a one way extension of the physical world into the virtual. The users' online experiences including their dynamic interactions infused with gaming, role playing and storytelling constitute a postmodern way of knowing or understanding. She explains: "If there is no underlying meaning, . . . postmodern theorists argue that the privileged way of knowing can only be through an exploration of surfaces This makes social knowledge into something that we might navigate much as we explore the Macintosh screen and its multiple layers of files and applications" (Turkle 112). She means that the computer screen is only a play of surface simulations. So the users recognize the virtual reality as an extension of the reality outside the screen. Turkle has thus put an end to the dichotomy between virtual reality and real life. This consolidates a dialectic between virtual reality and physical reality.

Cyber Power

Information is the most important commodity produced, stored, distributed, sold, accessed, consumed and reproduced in the cyber space. The cyber space constructs both individual and collective online identities. These are in fact identities related to the real social space. Tim Jordan (1999 a) considers cyber space as a "playground" used by the individual whereas it is a "social space" used by a cultural collective in his work *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet*. Jordan argues that the individuals who control information and technology have a "greater freedom of action" in the cyber space. The Internet and cyber space together construct a society which Jordan calls a "digital nation."

Poststructuralist theorists like Max Weber and Michel Foucault have developed socio-political theories of power. They argue that the ethical dimension of power revolves round the concepts that power creates social order and power is a form of domination. Foucault argues that power is pervasive and operates as a network of relations on free individuals. He remarks in *Power/Knowledge*: "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates or as something which only functions in the form of a chain Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization Individuals are the vehicles of power not its points of application" (Foucault 98). Foucault explains that power is conceptualized as a chain or a network, as a system of relationships in society, not as a simple system of relation between the oppressed and the oppressor. He also explains that individuals are not the recipients of power but the sites on

which power is enacted and resisted. The individual who uses the cyber space as well as the object or figure within is a site on which power operates transcends the boundaries between the virtual world and the real world.

The dimensions of power to create social order and domination can be used to explain the power in cyber space. Such a discussion does not put cyber power in the context of power per se, but power as a network of relations which exists both inside and outside the cyber space. In this context, it is worthwhile to recall Weber's concept of power as something stratified through social, economic and political orders (193). Power operating on individuals has a threefold stratification existing in the interrelated realms of status, class and party. Weber also rules out the direct action of power on individuals. The stratified spaces constitute a network similar to that proposed by Foucault.

Jordan argues that the concept of cyber power begins with the basic unit called online identity. In his work *Cyberpower: An Introduction to the Politics of Cyberspace* (1999), Jordan describes individuals' entry into cyber space:

We usually begin our journeys into cyber space as individuals. In front of a computer screen reading the glowing words, we confront our singularity before building a sense of others in the electronic world. There is a double sense of individuality here. First, people must simply connect to cyber space by logging in, which almost certainly involves individuals entering their online names and secret, personal passwords and then being rewarded with their little homes in cyber space (usually consisting of such elements as their email or list of favourite websites). (60)

Every user enters the cyber space through the basic email which requires user account names and passwords, creating a sense of identity and an individualized space. The email account may be linked with other email accounts creating email groups where everyone reads the message sent to everyone else in that particular group. The email group consists of several online identities which may have different characteristics as in Facebook, LinkedIn and so on. Online identities are characterized by identifiers like names, addresses, self descriptions and other data that designate contributions to cyber space. The email ID is the most common and simplest identifier which puts a stamp on the identity of the user. Online identities can choose to style their avatars or caricatures of gendered identities. Style therefore becomes another identifier. Identities are thus created and recreated online through the use of identifiers and style and Jordan calls this process "identity fluidity" (1999: 61).

Jordan argues that online identities inevitably result in "renovated hierarchies" which he defines as "the process through which offline hierarchies are reinvented online, with many online resources undermining offline hierarchies while also defining new hierarchies" (1999: 62). Online identities become part of renovated hierarchies as their access to information is unrestricted and therefore communication becomes more open and multilevel. Since offline identities are not always under consideration, sharing of information eliminates certain criteria limiting designation and socio-economic profile, often even gender and race. In this context, Jordan remarks: ". . . communication from many people to many people is close to the norm in cyber space. This opens participation in decision making, creating the potential for conclusions to be reached in more egalitarian ways than are available offline" (1999: 79). Jordan specifies only the merits of renovated hierarchies. But Lee Sproull and Sara Kiesler (1986, 1993) point to

certain probable demerits of renovated hierarchies: “. . . electronically mediated discussions are distinct from one to one or one to many discussions in that they are more inclusive, are more equal, require more time to reach decisions, and are more prone to abuse.” Electronic mediated discussions remain a substantial platform for participatory democracy. Sproull and Kiesler illustrate the argument with the example of the forum for medical professionals in Britain. They also argue that while the Internet holds massive information, the hoarding of information undermines authorities which operate the system and disrupts social order.

Virtual Politics

The innovation of the Internet is at once a technological and sociological revolution. It has affected the social stature conventionally enjoyed by individuals and demystified many hallowed professions. The greatest impact of the Internet is on democracy. The Internet has transformed the democratic functioning of societies. In this context, Garance Franke-Ruta (2003) states that the Internet boom has “created a new base of wealth free from long standing allegiances or deep involvement in traditional political circles.” It has trained the individuals in valuable technical skills. They thus gain a “raw power to make what they envision to do.” This resulted in the establishment and working of political-technical hybrid organizations like Silicon Valley.

According to Franke-Ruta, the Internet combines some of the characteristics of both television and newspaper. The Internet is an interactive platform where people meet online and build friendships. In the case of television, the viewers have a group membership based on social trust. So, television viewing is strongly but negatively related to group identification. The Internet at once provides information and entertainment provided by television and newspapers. In this context, Franke-Ruta remarks: “Those spending time in the Internet isolates people in physical space, the fundamental quality of the Internet is that it is ultimately interactive. The most common Internet applications-email and instant messaging software-drive people into epistolary relations” (2003). She emphasizes the interactive quality of the Internet which cultivates personal relations in terms of message exchanges. In this context, Stirling Newberry also observes: “Technologies are social organizations primarily . . . in the modern age, the technology that is driving people to communicate at the front end of the campaign is the Internet” (Quoted in Franke-Ruta). He points to the social orientation of technologies. The Internet is the most advanced form of communicative medium in contemporary times.

As a technology, the Internet is a social structure. Individuals organize themselves to use it. It is a powerful political tool explored in the political campaigns of many nations. Internet savvy politicians gain an edge over their rivals in the electronically assisted campaigns. Television commercials also use the Internet as a medium for promoting commodities. Franke-Ruta also refers to the metaphor of free and open source systems which explain the characteristics of virtual communities. These technological programmes are maintained by a community of coders who are entitled to “propose a new code.” The interactions in the process of integrating and recreating these programmes are central to the functioning of a virtual community.

Technology controls contemporary society where information is the most vital commodity. In such societies culture is conditioned by information and communication systems. The Internet as a technological and social tool of power helps to access information and change

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the process of decision making. The Internet cultivates participatory democracy by making social interactions simple and easy.

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