The Internet: Social Effects

History of Information 103
Geoff Nunberg
(by way of pd)

April 21, 2011
Hypertext creator says structure of World Wide Web 'completely wrong'

Ted Nelson claims ‘traditional’ IT industry, calls Microsoft, Apple, Linux ‘exactly the same’

Lisa Banks (CIO) | 15 April, 2011 13:21 | Comments 14 | Like 153

Ted Nelson claims the structure of the Web is too complex and not a visual as it could be. [By Dgies (Own work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0) or GFDL (www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html)], via Wikimedia Commons]

The creator of hypertext has criticised the design of the World Wide Web, saying that Tim Berners-Lee’s creation is “completely wrong”, and that Windows, Macintosh and Linux have “exactly the same” approach to computing.
Sir Tim Berners-Lee complains of extreme views on Twitter

Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the web, has complained that debates on Twitter tend to be dominated by extreme views.

In a speech at the launch of the British office of W3C, the organisation that sets technical standards for the web, he challenged the audience as to whether it could be possible to design a system for more reasoned discourse online.

Sir Tim, who has almost 44,000 followers but is a more irregular Twitter user than many famous web figures, used "net neutrality" as an example of how debate can become polarised on the microblogging platform.

He has campaigned on the issue, arguing that ISPs should not be allowed to charge big websites for better service than smaller ones and networks should treat all web traffic equally.

Sir Tim’s comments about Twitter are not the first time he has criticised social media services. Last year he took aim at Facebook for the way it assumes ownership of data about its users so it cannot be used elsewhere on the web.
"at bottom, this invention might suffice to make possible the establishment of democracy among a large population ... no reason why it would not be possible for all the citizens of France to communicate their will ... in such a way that this communication might be considered instantaneous."

Alexandre Vandermond, 1795
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Alexandre Vandermond, 1795
"Making a better machine cannot make men better."

Emile Zola
La Bête Humaine, 1890

and moral progress

"facilitating Human Intercourse and producing Harmony among Men and Nations ... [I]t may be regarded as an important element in Moral Progress"

-- Daily Chronicle [Cincinnati] 1847

"the hand of progress beckons .... a rivet is loosened from the chains of the oppressed"

--Commercial and Financial Chronicle, 1865.

"the great chain that will bring all civilized nations into instantaneous communication...the most potent of all the means of civilization, and the most effective in breaking down the barriers of evil prejudice and custom" --Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, 1868
Cairncross's determined trendspotting

1. Death of distance
2. Fate of Location
3. Improved Connections
4. Increased Mobility
5. More Customized Networks
6. Deluge of Information
7. Increased Value of Brand
8. More Minnows, more Giants
9. More Competition
10. Increased Value of Niches
11. Communities of Practices
12. Loose-Knit Corporation Culture
13. Openness
14. Manufacturers as Service Providers
15. Inversion of Home and Office
16. Proliferation of Ideas
17. Decline of National Authority
18. Loss of Privacy
19. Global Premium for Skills
20. Rebirth of Cities
21. Rise of English
22. Communities of Culture
23. A New Trust
24. People as Scarce Resource
25. Global Peace

Social Effects of the Internet
22. Communities of Culture

17. Decline of National Authority
The Internet: Social Consequences

Does the internet build communities or fragment them?
The Internet: Social Consequences

Does the internet build communities or fragment them?

Yes.
Social Life in a Virtual World

Predictions that Internet/Web will decentralize authority & permit ground-up social & political organization and the development of "virtual communities"

Cf the "virtual corporation," "smart mobs," moveon.org, etc., which are said to facilitate direct democracy
1978-79: Early MUDS (Multi-User Dungeons) enable players of text-adventure games to interact & team up.

1979 > Early BBS’s (Bulletin Board services) allow users to connect via modem to a common server & post messages.

1980: USENET is conceived as “poor man’s ARPANET” to allow users to exchange email & software.

1990: First MOOs ["MUD Object Oriented"] created at Xerox Palo Alto Research center. Permits participants to create objects, rooms, etc.
1985: Stewart Brand & Larry Brilliant found the BBS The Well (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), which becomes an influential “virtual community” providing email, forums, etc.

WELL participants go on to found Craigslist, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Salon.com, etc.

1986: Matchmaker dating service begun as text-based BBS, adding to groups like soc.singles, etc. By 2003, US Web-based online dating services draw 40m annual visitors.

1995 Craig Newmark founds Craigslist in San Francisco for posting of local events; by 2000, expanded to 9 cities.
The Beginnings of Social Networking Sites

1997: Slashdot created to provide user-generated “News for nerds.” Becomes wildly popular antecedent of blogs.

1997 Sixdegrees.com founded, social networking site that achieved 1m members and anticipated Friendster, MySpace, LinkedIn & FaceBook etc.
Political organization online

1998 Moveon.org founded to militate for moving past Clinton impeachment hearings. In 2003, becomes important channel for opposition to Iraq war, major source of funding for antiwar candidates.

2002 Meetup.com founded to facilitate offline meeting and networking of interest groups. During buildup to campaign, it becomes an important source of grassroots political organization for Howard Dean campaign, later for Kerry & Edwards.
The Triumph of Social Networks

2003: myspace founded, rapidly becomes largest soc. networking site. Complaints about stalking, exploitation, spam, etc. lead some schools to block site.

2003: Second Life launched by Linden Labs.
The Triumph of Social Networks

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2004: Facebook launched by Harvard undergrad Mark Zuckerberg, extended to other colleges, high schools, & general public. By 2010, claims 500m members worldwide.

2008: Helped by Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, Obama campaign's use of new media ("MyBo") enables it to raise $200m by end of primary season and recruit numerous volunteers.
The Triumph of Social Networks

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The complications of “community”

“Community” usually implies rich interaction around common interests.

Online interaction creates or strengthens groups organized around significant common interests; e.g., sexual orientation, political activism, diseases...

But "community" is also used for almost any kind of group formed online… so long as it's judged positive.
Varieties of Online Community

Relation of online media to social groups

Supports  Amplifies/extends  Transforms  Creates

high-school alums
Book History list
MeetUp
leukemia dl

Thursday, April 21, 2011
Reinforcing Social Divisions
education and equality


Stratification of social space

What distinguishes adoption of MySpace and Facebook among American teens is not cleanly about race or class, … The division can be seen through the lens of taste and aesthetics, two value-laden elements that are deeply entwined with race and class. It can also be seen through the network structures of teen friendship, which are also directly connected to race and class. And it can be seen through the language that teens – and adults – use to describe these sites.

danah boyd
Social wars

Cheesy or creative; classy or boring?

'MySpace is for the riff-raff and Facebook is for the landed gentry.'

'MySpace just seems like the other side of the tracks.'

Do social media always reproduce offline categories?
The “so-called ‘cool’” girls
• ~75% identified as Black & Latino
• Tended to be less privileged families
  • ~75% free or reduced lunch
• Some gender interaction with cool boys

The “so-called ‘cool’” boys
• 100% identified as Black & Latino
• Tended to be less privileged families
  • ~60% free or reduced lunch
• Some gender interaction with cool girl and girls in the interstices

The “good nerdy” or “goodie two shoe” girls
• ~80% identify as White or Asian
• Tended to be more privileged families
  • ~20% free or reduced lunch
• Many families with graduate and professional degrees
• Little gender mixing with any boys, some online with geeky boys

The “nerdy,” “geeky,” “gamer” boys
• Largest group
• ~60% identified as White and Asian
• Tended to be more privileged families
  • ~30% free or reduced lunch
• Many families with graduate and professional degrees
• Most diversity in terms of social class and race & ethnicity
Media Practices

The “so-called ‘cool’” girls
- Biggest users of communications media
- Simulation games and virtual worlds
- Resisted school-assigned media production
- After-School:
  - Community-based organizations
  - Home (homework, online, babysitting, helping out)

The “so-called ‘cool’” boys
- Least involved with digital media
- Gaming & music most popular
- Communications regulated by family
- After-School:
  - Team Sports
  - Community-based organizations

The “good nerdy” or “goodie two shoe” girls
- School-assigned media production
- Simulation games
- Communications popular but regulated by family
- After-School:
  - Individualistic, market-mediated, lessons and classes

The “nerdy,” “geeky,” “gamer” boys
- Committed gaming
- School-assigned media production
- Out-of-school media production, model making, tinkering
- After-School:
  - School-based after-school focused on media production
  - Individualistic, market-mediated, lessons and classes

Thursday, April 21, 2011
Does the Internet Unify Community?
"The new electronic independence recreates the world in the image of a global village." Marshall McLuhan

“The power of elites to determine what [is] news via a tightly controlled dissemination system [has been] shattered. The ability and authority to distribute text are now truly democratized” Hugh Hewitt
Is the Internet a Community?

Cf. James F. Moore (Berkman Center), on "the global consciousness of the second superpower":

The Internet and other interactive media continue to penetrate more and more deeply all world society... The collective power of texting, blogging, instant messaging, and email across millions of actors cannot be overestimated. Like a mind constituted of millions of inter-networked neurons, the social movement is capable of astonishingly rapid and sometimes subtle community consciousness and action... the emergent democracy of the second superpower is alive with touching and being touched by each other, as the community works to create wisdom and to take action....
Is the Internet a Community?

Social implications of ‘cyberspace’, ‘the infosphere’ etc.

A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone.....You have no sovereignty where we gather.

...I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. ...

...You have not engaged in our great and gathering conversation, nor did you create the wealth of our marketplaces. You do not know our culture, our ethics, or the unwritten codes that already provide our society more order than could be obtained by any of your impositions.

John Perry Barlow, Electronic Frontier Foundation, 1996
Claims about online political discourse

The internet

- Broadens access to information
- Broadens the opportunity to speak.
- Increases the number of information sources, bypassing media "gatekeepers" or official censors.
- Offers information about a wider range of topics, and more information and opinion on any given topic.
- Provides more reliable ways of checking or interpreting information, and gives citizens more opportunity to verify information.
Claims about online political discourse

The internet

Restricts the exchange of information and opinion to a more closed, like-minded group (silo effect)

Exposes people to more information that is misleading, inaccurate, extreme, inflammatory, etc.;

Eliminates the guidance that the traditional media provided.

Widens the divisions between the informed and ill-informed sectors of the public.
Polarization of Political Discourse
Online discourse facilitates "siloing" of political discourse…

But siloing has independent offline roots

Polarization of political language on the Internet mirrors polarization of elite/activist views and the increasing importance of elective associations (geographical, occupational)

Number of Americans living in landslide counties:
1976: 26%
2008: 48%
Forum: Political diversity lacking on college campuses

By RICHARD E. REDDING - Athens Banner-Herald
Published Tuesday, November 02, 2010

Last month, 18 million college students returned to school - to those hotbeds of debate about the crucial issues of the day, right? But not so fast. A major new study on the campus climate for viewpoint diversity - surveying 24,000 U.S. students and published by the American Association of University Professors - found otherwise.

Only a third of college students felt that their professors made learning about different views a priority. In fact, most did not think it entirely safe to hold unpopular opinions on campus. Since more seniors felt this way than freshmen, it appears that the college experience makes students less comfortable about exploring and voicing diverse opinions.

This lack of intellectual diversity at our nation's colleges and universities should be a concern to all of us. It means that our future leaders in industry, government and science are receiving a one-sided education that leaves them ill-equipped, as the report explains, to work "across differences to tackle challenges and create solutions." It also limits the phenomena studied, questions asked and solutions proposed by professors who, as the main producers of research and development in this country, fuel our innovative edge.
Figure 1: Community structure of political blogs (expanded set), shown using utilizing a GEM layout [11] in the GUESS[3] visualization and analysis tool. The colors reflect political orientation, red for conservative, and blue for liberal. Orange links go from liberal to conservative, and purple ones from conservative to liberal. The size of each blog reflects the number of other blogs that link to it.

Lada Adamic & Nathalie Glance, 2005, "Divided They Blog"
traffic is also polarized

Figure 4.4: This figure maps traffic among the top 50 political Websites, as of May 2006. Liberal- or Democratic-leaning sites are in blue; conservative- or Republican-leaning sites are in red. Self-declared neutral or nonpartisan sites are in gray.
### Table 3.2
Links to Allies and Adversaries, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political orientation</th>
<th>Links to opposition</th>
<th>No links to opposition</th>
<th>Links to like-minded sites</th>
<th>No links to like-minded sites</th>
<th>Total sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Cass Sunnstein, Republic.com 2.0
Polarization by gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Male readership (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>DailyKos.com</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Eschaton (Atrios)</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Crooks and liars</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>RedState.org</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Wonkette</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Andrew Sullivan</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Kevin Drum</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Hugh Hewitt</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sites with highest pct of male readers tend to be conservative
### Distribution by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>18-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>DailyKos.com</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eschaton (Atrios)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Crooks and liars</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>RedState.org</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wonkette</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>41%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Andrew Sullivan</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Kevin Drum</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hugh Hewitt</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: The table presents Hitwise data on the age of visitors to prominent political blogs, as of October 2005. Because of rounding, each row may not add up to exactly 100 percent. The central finding here is that blogger readership is not just limited to the young. On average, half of the readership to these blogs comes from those 45 and older.
Participation in online political discourse
Participation in online political discourse

Does the net level the informational playing field?

Initially, those with access tend to be younger, college-educated, male, white...

Curves of access are flattening...

(Pew report "Generations 2010")

Note: total use is still far smaller than for other media.

But how much does access/daily use predict political engagement?
Political Participation Online

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type by Socio-Economic Level

Big SES Gradient:
44% in 1st to 99% in 5th

Courtesy of Henry Brady

Thursday, April 21, 2011
Reinforcing Social Divisions

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type
by Age Categories

Big Age Gradient:
90% to 32%
Political Participation Online

Percent Using Social Networking Sites
by Socio-Economic Level

Social Networking Less Stratified by SES:
18% in 1st to 33% in 5th

100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
1st Fifth 2 Mid Fifth 4 Top Fifth

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Political Participation Online

Percent Web Political Acts and Social Networking by Socio-Economic Level

Web Political Acts Much More SES Stratified than Social Networking:
11% in 1st to 65% in 5th

Web Political Acts

Social Networking

1st Fifth 2 Mid Fifth 4 Top Fifth
"Winner take all" effects: Zipf's Law distributions

(note: Most influential bloggers are journalists etc.)

Internet doesn't level political participation or access to political information within society…

But it may broaden participation & information flow among political classes…

And does facilitate lateral connections & organization
One World Language?
The Internationalization of the Web

Initial prevalence of English on the Web
1997 -- Nunberg & Schuetze survey of 2.3 million pages from Web crawl: 85 percent of content is in English, including about 35 percent of content in non-English speaking domains.

   Eng. Most common in N. Europe, less-developed nations

2000: Jack Xu Excite@Home; survey of around 600 million pages: 72% are in English
The Internationalization of the Web

Relative size of Eng-speaking population in developed world

Cf. Web penetration, 1997
Fears of English Hegemony...

“The Web is the ultimate act of intellectual colonialism.” Director of Russian ISP, 1999

“Nearly 70 per cent of the world's Web sites are in English, at times crowding out voices and views.” Kofi Annan, 12-Jan-04
Once again, we see the risk of a crushing American domination in defining the idea that subsequent generations will form of the world. The criteria for choosing [the books in the Google print collection] will be strongly marked by the Anglo-Saxon point of view. It would be detestable if one found in the English and American databases only narratives and interpretations [about the French Revolution] that were biased in multiple ways -- the valliant British aristocrats triumphing over the bloody Jacobins, the guillotine blotting out the rights of man.

-- Jean-Noël Jeanneney, Director, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
And Anglophone Triumphalism...

The Internet is "a great force for the Anglification of the planet."

“[Thanks to the Internet,] English will be the native language of a majority of the world by some time in the next century.” Editor, *The Futurist*

"There is no retreat from English as the world language; no retreat from and English-speaking world." Sridath Ramphal, chairman of Commission on Global Governance, 1996
Growth of Other Languages on the Web

Top Ten Languages in the Internet 2010 - in millions of users

- English: 536.6
- Chinese: 444.9
- Spanish: 153.3
- Japanese: 99.1
- Portuguese: 82.5
- German: 75.2
- Arabic: 65.4
- French: 59.8
- Russian: 59.7
- Korean: 39.4
- All the rest: 350.6

Estimated internet users are 1,966,514,816 on June 30, 2010
Copyright © 2000 - 2010, Miniwatts Marketing Group
Internet Penetration Moves toward Equalization...

Penetration increases most sharply in Africa, Middle East, Latin America...

<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>991,002,342</td>
<td>4,514,400</td>
<td>86,217,900</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>1,809.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>3,808,070,503</td>
<td>114,304,000</td>
<td>764,435,900</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>568.8%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>803,850,858</td>
<td>105,096,093</td>
<td>425,773,571</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>305.1%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>202,687,005</td>
<td>3,284,800</td>
<td>58,309,546</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>1,675.1%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>340,831,831</td>
<td>108,096,800</td>
<td>259,561,000</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>140.1%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>586,662,468</td>
<td>18,068,919</td>
<td>186,922,050</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>934.5%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania / Australia</td>
<td>34,700,201</td>
<td>7,620,480</td>
<td>21,110,490</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>177.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORLD TOTAL</td>
<td>6,767,805,208</td>
<td>360,985,492</td>
<td>1,802,330,457</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>399.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. Internet stats are as of December 31, 2000.
2. CHS: Chinese Home System.
Web encourages the spread of English…
And maintenance and spread of smaller national, regional, and ethnic languages
Connects linguistic diasporas…
"Effective with this sentence, Wired News will no longer capitalize the "I" in internet. At the same time, Web becomes web and Net becomes net. Why? The simple answer is because there is no earthly reason to capitalize any of these words. Actually, there never was... a change in our house style was necessary to put into perspective what the internet is: another medium for delivering and receiving information. That it transformed human communication is beyond dispute. But no more so than moveable type did in its day. Or the radio. Or television." Wired, 8/16/04
Social Effects of the Internet

The Internet potentially amplifies and enhances all forms of social organization … But doesn't eliminate basic conflicts and oppositions…
In the reading, after looking at the "localization of industry," Marshall writes "Every cheapening of the means of communication, every new facility for the free interchange of ideas ... alters the action of the forces which tend to localize industries." How has this claim withstood the development of our "modern means of communication"?