

Lessons from the Victorian Internet

What We Learned about Technology and Society

System	The Victorian Internet – Changes	Today’s Internet – Changes
Intimacy/Family Systems	Telegraphers began communicating almost solely through their messages to other telegraphers instead of engaging in face-to-face communications in their community.	Gamers create virtual avatars and collaborate with other avatars in a virtual arena in massive multiplayer role-playing games like World of War Craft.
Healing/Health Systems	Communities could hail a doctor for a sick patient quicker and doctors could collaborate about new communicable diseases faster.	People can use WebMD to self-diagnose even though it is not recommended and search forums for a support group of people with similar symptoms.
Class/Ethnicity Systems	Telegraph was available mostly to the rich and wealthy.	Classes that live in a more rural/under developed area have less access to the Internet.
Power/Authority/Political Systems	Everyone wanted a piece of the innovation of the telegraph and it came and went within a forty year time span.	During the dot.com period everyone wanted to make it big using the Internet and then it came and went with Silicon Valley.
Moral or Ethics Systems & Legal Systems	Hackers and cheats developed in the telegraph world for personal/business gain.	Scams exist where people use the internet to steal money from innocent internet users or hack in to major institutions.
Defense/Military Systems	Telegraph designed to provide current information on war status and troop placement.	Support network for the defense departments; provide support and assistance to military wives/families.
Communications Systems	Set new boundaries and brought the world together on a smaller scale.	Set new boundaries and allows people to know exactly what they’re doing at the moment they’re doing it.
Ecological/Land/Place Systems	Wires were ran everywhere in the world, including laid on the bottom of the ocean.	New wires for FiOS and other networking systems are being hung everyday.
Aesthetic System	Telegraphers communicated and fell in love before every seeing the attractiveness of each other.	eHarmony and other advanced dating sites match people across multiple facets of personality, including physical attractiveness.
Sustenance/Economic Systems	Western Union was created so that banks and people could send and transfer money across the nation almost instantly.	Online bill pay and merchandise purchases are a way of life for some people, never having to leave their home to buy anything.
Knowledge Systems	Young people wanted to train to become telegraphers and it was held as an important and secure knowledge based job.	Young people create their own websites everyday surpassing the past generations knowledge of the internet and using it to collaborate across continents for even business.

Values/Religious Systems	With minimal witnesses and a preacher present, couples married far away from each other via telegraph.	Dating sites for all walks of life exist so one can meet and marry one they loved based on a specific belief they have.
Educational Systems	Teachers taught students the innovation of the telegraph on other systems.	Teachers use the internet to teach students the system of systems.

Generalizations: What Happens in a Civilization When New Technology (Technique) is Introduced?

1. Adoption Process – few, to a few more, to everyone. There is an experimentation process and then a new reliance/dependence emerges.
2. Resisters and Adopters – technophiles and technophobes.
3. New technologies most often emerge from government and military.
4. Technology is most often discovered/created to solve an existing problem and then emerges with a whole new set of uses.
5. New technology brings with it both solutions and problems.
6. Institutions lag behind technology users.
7. Human nature is human nature – the good will find good uses and the bad will find bad uses.
8. A new technology pin balls through the whole civilization impacting all systems; the education system can't stand apart.
9. One technology (technique) leads to further technology (techniques) leading to further technology (techniques).
10. Technology leads to complexity; it doesn't simplify it changes.