

During the 1990s, online technologies in general and the World Wide Web in particular captured America's imagination with extraordinary intensity. This was expressed in an array of statements about major societal transformations, such as the creation of virtual communities and the coming of a new economy. In an influential book about virtual communities, Howard Rheingold argued that "whenever [computer-mediated communication] technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as microorganisms inevitably create colonies" (1994, p. 6). Similarly dramatic words have been uttered about the economy. "From the whirlwind of the dot com firms emerged a new economic landscape," wrote Manuel Castells (2001, p. 66). Castells added that, by resorting to the Internet "as a fundamental medium of communication and information-processing," business "adopts the network as its organizational form." "This sociotechnical transformation," he continued, "permeates throughout the entire economic system, and affects all processes of value creation, value exchange, and value distribution." (ibid.)

Discourse about the potential implications of online technologies and the World Wide Web for the mass media has also had a drastic connotation, raising the specter of radical consequences for the production and the consumption of news. Concerning news production, John Pavlik has suggested that the convergence of computers and telecommunication has brought forth a "new media system [that] embraces all forms of human communication in a digital format where the rules and constraints of the analog world no longer apply" (2001, p. xii), and that these technologies are "rapidly rewriting the traditional assumptions of newsroom organization and structure" (ibid., p. 108). Regarding news products and their consumption, Nicholas Negroponte has contended that "being digital will change the economic model of news selections, make