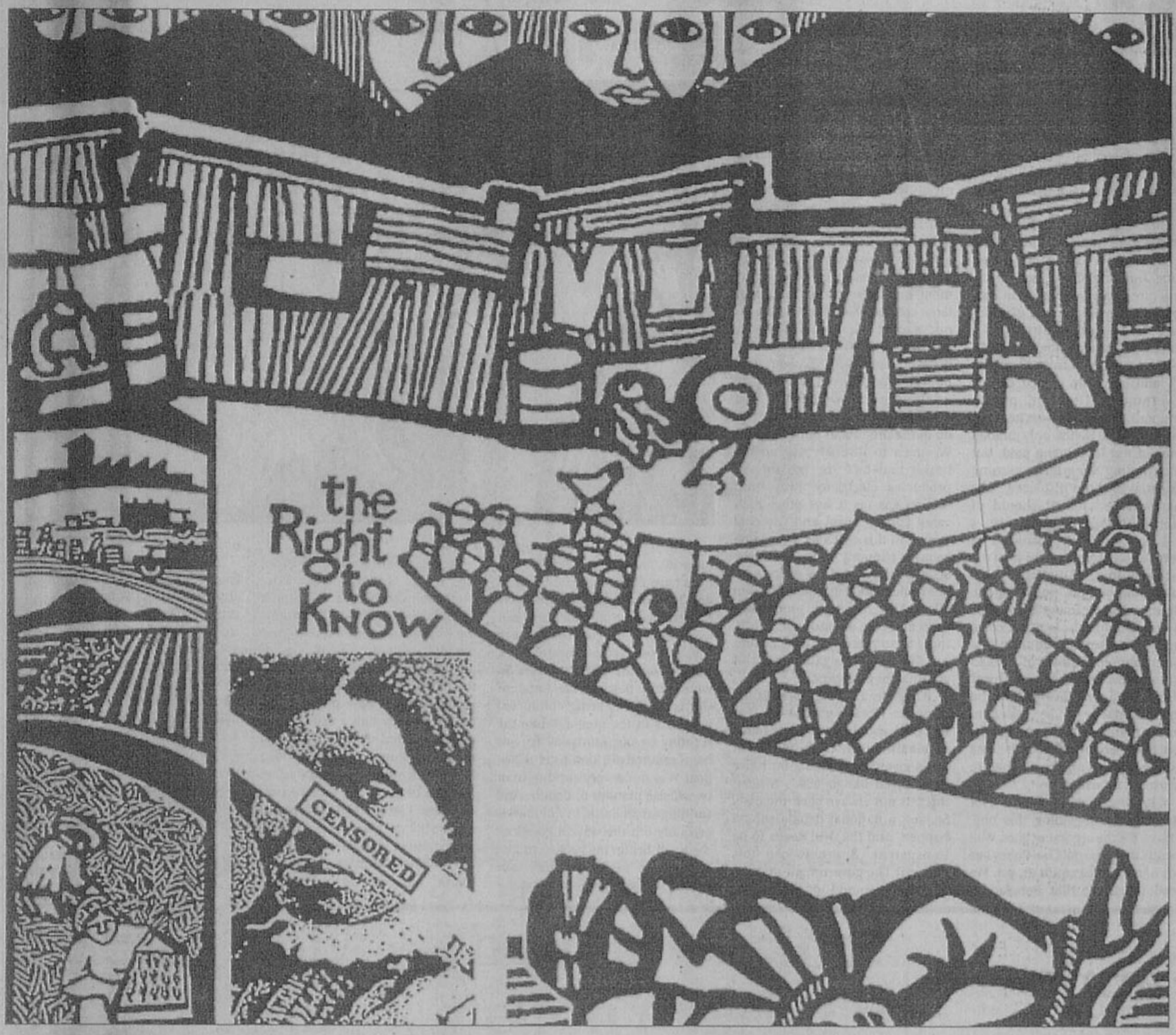


Impact of new media technology on society



What is new is that young people today, and most people in future, will be happy to decide for themselves what is credible or worthwhile and what is not. They will have plenty of help. Sometimes they will rely on human editors of their choosing; at other times they will rely on collective intelligence in the form of new filtering and collaboration technologies that are now being developed. The old media model was: there is one source of truth. The new media model is: there are multiple sources of truth, and we will sort it out.

SERAJUL I. BHUIYAN

THE exponential rate of technological change that has transformed media and communication structures globally is reflected in the degree of attention paid to the convergent media nexus by the international community. With the rapid growth of new media technology including the Internet, interactive television networks, and multimedia information services, many proponents emphasize their potential to increase interactive mass media, entertainment, commerce, and education.

Pundits and policy makers also predicting that free speech and privacy will be preserved and our democratic institutions will be strengthened by new communication opportunities enhanced by digital media. This is because access to and use of digital media technologies such as PCs, the Internet, computer games, mobile telephones, etc., have become a normal aspect of everyday life in the world community country.

Media experts also recognize that there is a revolution in media industry everywhere in the world brought by new media technology or convergent media that changes the way of communication in society. What then is a convergent media? And what impact it has on our society?

The idea of technological convergence generally refers to shifts in the use of different technologies from diverse scientific and technical spheres that have been brought together to create new objects and new uses for those objects. The idea of digital convergence specifically refers to the movement of telecommunications, print, broadcast and computing into new domains for the purpose of creating products that tie together all of these elements to bring about new forms of communication and information storage.

In a converged media world, consumers increasingly call the shots. They use Apple iPods to make their own music playlists. Personal video recorders allow them to customize television

schedules. Digital Audio Broadcasting or DAB Digital Radio pumps static-free music to their homes and cars. These consumers pull stock-market updates, text messages, wallpaper, ring-tones, and short-form video into their mobile phones. They come together in online communities, generate their own content, mix it, and share it on a growing number of social networks. No longer a captive, mass media audience; today's media consumer is unique, demanding, and engaged.

Broadband access and the Internet Protocol (IP) have made this new breed of consumer possible. Broadband Internet access is promoting major growth across all regions, with broadband reaching 448 million households globally by 2009. Telecommunications carriers are investing heavily in IP, laying fiber to homes and betting substantially on the promise of next-generation, content-based services. Broadband and IP will be the foundation through which consumers organize their work,

leisure, and social time -- and they are also the solvent penetrating the walls of the until now separate video content, communications, and advertising industries. Now that video content is no longer tied to a specific access network or device the rules are radically changing for all value chain participants.

In the broadest sense, convergence is a process whereby media companies break out of their traditional forms and formats to deliver richer news and information services more in concert with the way that consumers are choosing to access and use such resources. It is a response to changes in the media environment brought on by technology and the information economy. Convergence is defined in four ways:

A convergence of services: the same content is formed to suit several platforms -- e.g. news may be distributed both via ordinary newspapers or radio slots and streamed via the Internet

A convergence of networks: the same platform may contain

several types of content -- e.g. telephone cables are used both for internet and telecommunication

A convergence of terminals: terminals (e.g. computer, TV) are all multifunctional, although some are more feasible for certain types of services than others -- e.g. we prefer to send mail or sms via our mobile phone rather than via our TV, while films are watched on the big TV or cinema screen rather than via the small display on the mobile phone

A convergence of markets: we see trans-border mergers and acquisitions between the media, telecommunications and ICT industries -- e.g. the large-scale merger in 2000 between Time Warner and the internet provider AOL (America Online).

Convergent Media and the Age of Participation

The Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 57% of American teenagers create content for the internet -- from text to pictures, music and video. In this new-media culture, people no longer passively consume media (and thus advertising, its main revenue source) but actively participate in them, which usually means creating content, in whatever form and on whatever scale. This does not have to mean that people write their own newspaper.

This has profound implications for traditional business models in the media industry, which are based on aggregating large passive audiences and holding them captive during advertising interruptions. In the new-media era, audiences will occasionally be large, but often small, and usually tiny. Instead of a few large capital-rich media giants competing with one another for these audiences, it will be small firms and individuals competing or, more often, collaborating. Some will be making money from the content they create; others will not and will not mind, because they have other motives. For example, people create stuff to build their own reputations.

With participatory media, the boundaries between audiences and content creators become

blurred and often invisible. In the words, one-to-many, that is, from media companies to their audiences (people say media companies used to lecture audiences/readers). This changes the tone of public discussions. The mainstream media, don't get how subversive it is to take institutions and turn them into conversations. That is because institutions are closed, assume a hierarchy and have trouble admitting fallibility, whereas conversations are open-ended, assume equality and eagerly concede fallibility.

In essence, in the participatory era, media will no longer be delivered one way from a media company to an audience but by audience members to other audience members. The distinction between content creators and consuming audiences first gets blurry and then disappears completely. Instead of media being delivered as a sermon or lecture, it becomes a conversation among the people in the audience. How can an audience or readers do that?

Today's media revolution, like others before it, is announcing itself with a new and strange vocabulary. Blog, Podcast, Wikis, Wikipedia, Vlogs, and Folksonomies.

A weblog, which is usually shortened to blog, is a type of website where entries are made (such as in a journal or diary), displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. Most blogs are primarily textual although many focus on photographs, videos or audio. The word blog can also be used as a verb, meaning adding an entry to a blog.

Podcasting is the method of distributing multimedia files, such as audio programs or music videos, over the Internet using either the RSS or Atom syndication formats, for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. The term podcast, like radio, can mean both the content and the method of delivery. The host or author of a podcast is often called a podcaster. Podcasters' web sites may also offer direct download or streaming of their files; a podcast however is distinguished by its ability to be downloaded automatically using software capable of reading RSS or Atom feeds.

Usually a podcast features one type of show, with new episodes released either sporadically or at planned intervals such as daily or weekly. In addition, there are podcast networks that feature multiple shows on the same feed.

Wiki is a piece of server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser. Wiki supports hyperlinks and has a simple text syntax for creating new pages and crosslinks between internal pages on the fly. Wiki is unusual among group communication mechanisms in that it allows the organization of contributions to be edited in addition to the content itself. Like many simple concepts, "open editing" has some profound and subtle effects on Wiki usage. Allowing everyday users to create and edit any page in a Web site is exciting in that it encourages democratic use of the Web and promotes content composition by non-technical users.

Wikipedia is an international Web-based free-content encyclopedia project. It exists as a wiki, a website that allows visitors to edit its content. The word Wikipedia itself is a portmanteau of the words wiki and encyclopedia. Wikipedia is written collaboratively by volunteers, allowing most articles to be changed by anyone with access to the website. Wikipedia's main servers are in Tampa, Florida, with additional servers in Amsterdam and Seoul.

Midway through 2006, Wikipedia had more than 4,600,000 articles in many languages, including more than 1,200,000 in the English-language version. There were more than 200 language editions of Wikipedia, fifteen of which had more than 50,000 articles each. The German-language edition has been distributed on DVD-



ROM, and there were also proposals for an English DVD or paper edition. Since its inception, Wikipedia has steadily risen in popularity, and has spawned several sister projects. According to Alexa (an internet traffic observer), Wikipedia ranked in the top 20 most visited websites, and many of its pages had been mirrored or forked by other sites, such as Answers.com.

Wikipedia's co-founder, Jimmy Wales, has called Wikipedia "an effort to create and distribute a multilingual free encyclopedia of the highest possible quality to every single person on the planet in their own language." However, there has been controversy over Wikipedia's reliability and accuracy, with the site receiving criticism for its susceptibility to vandalism, uneven quality and inconsistency, systemic bias, and preference for consensus or popularity over credentials. Its free distribution, constant and plentiful updates, diverse coverage, and versions in numerous languages have made it a popular Internet destination.

A vlog or videoblog is a blog which uses video as the primary content. Regular entries are made and presented in reverse chronological order. A typical vlog entry combines an embedded video or video link with supporting text, images, and metadata. Vlogs often take advantage of web syndication. Web syndication allows the distribution of video over the Internet using either the RSS or Atom syndication formats, for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. Vlog Communities exist which are sites that feature vlogs from multiple authors. Though many vlogs are collaborative efforts, the majority of vlogs and vlog entries are authored by individuals.

A folksonomy is a collaboratively generated, open-ended labeling system that enables Internet users to categorize content such as Web pages, online photographs, and Web links. The freely chosen labels -- called tags -- help to improve search engine's effectiveness because content is categorized using a familiar, accessible, and shared vocabulary. The labeling process is called tagging. Two widely cited examples of websites using folksonomic tagging are Flickr and Del.icio.us.

Because folksonomies develop in Internet-mediated social environments, users can discover (generally) who created a given folksonomy tag, and see the other tags that this person created. In this way, folksonomy users often discover the tag sets of another user who tends to interpret and tag content in a way that makes sense to them. The result, often, is an immediate and rewarding gain in the user's capacity to find related content. Part of the appeal of folksonomy is its inherent subversiveness: faced with the dreadful performance of the search tools that Web sites typically provide, folksonomies can be seen as a rejection of the search engine status quo in favor of tools that are both created by the community and beneficial to the community.

Folksonomy creation and searching tools are not part of the underlying World Wide Web protocols. Folksonomies arise in Web-based communities where special provisions are made at the site level for creating and using tags. These communities are established to enable Web users to label and share user-generated content, such as photographs, or to collaboratively label existing content, such as Web sites, books, works in the scientific and scholarly literatures, and blog entries. These new collaborative processes "folksonomies" -- to distinguish them from the top-down

"taxonomies" that human editors traditionally create.

Convergent Media and Young Generation

What is new is that young people today, and most people in future, will be happy to decide for themselves what is credible or worthwhile and what is not. They will have plenty of help. Sometimes they will rely on human editors of their choosing; at other times they will rely on collective intelligence in the form of new filtering and collaboration technologies that are now being developed. The old media model was: there is one source of truth. The new media model is: there are multiple sources of truth, and we will sort it out.

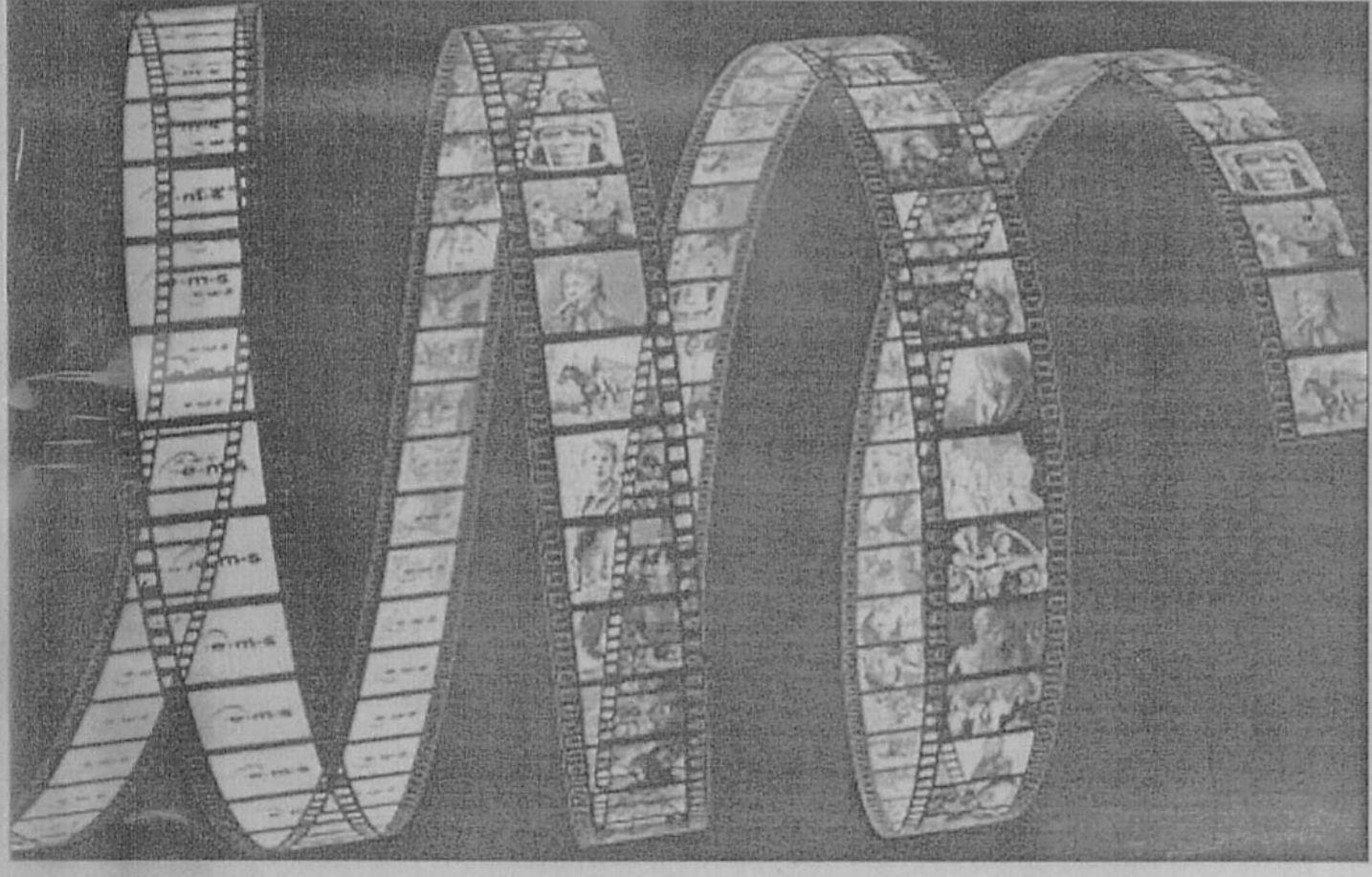
The obvious benefit of this media revolution will be an explosion of creativity: a flowering of expressive diversity on the scale of the eponymous proliferation of biological species 530 million years ago. We are entering an age of cultural richness and abundant choice that we've never seen before in history. Peer production is the most powerful industrial force of our time.

At the same time revolutions tend to suck for ordinary people. Indeed, many people in the traditional media are pessimistic about the rise of a participatory culture, either because they believe it threatens the business model that they have grown used to, or because they feel it threatens public discourse, civility and even democracy.

In brief, I would like to say that convergent journalism is more powerful because it reaches more people at more levels, in more ways. Convergence is now an established industry trend, no longer just an experiment or a fad. Not all of today's journalists and editors will make the transition to working for converged media companies, to thinking in terms of multiple media rather than just their format of specialization. Media managers should be prepared for how they will deal with those who cannot adapt. Convergence should be integrated into hiring, job descriptions, performance evaluations and career incentives, including salary. Media companies should decide up front what their remuneration policies are for cross-media performance to forestall deadlock on this issue. Newsrooms are no more resistant to change than other departments of a news organization. However, it should be remembered that journalists were hired for their skeptical and questioning natures. So it should be expected that they will be skeptical about any change in their own environment that is not well explained and well implemented.

Convergent Media and Democracy

Maximizing free speech and the free flow of information in online and interactive media is emphasized in western democracy. Interactive media, unlike mass media, feature abundant bandwidth, diverse programming, and increased control by users over programming they receive and information with which they interact. These characteristics of new media increasingly undermine past rationales and future effectiveness of government speech content restrictions which have dominated the mass media. Interactive media requires alternative, less intrusive, means -- often relying on technology rather than content regulation -- for achieving public ends.



Dr. Serajul I. Bhuiyan is Professor and Director of Mass Communications and Journalism, Lincoln University, US, and Visiting Professor of Business, Eastern University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.