

Predicting Interactive Communication via the Internet

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1966

This Hour Has Seven Days

Interviewer: Robert Fulford (Canadian journalist)

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Fulford

You have been writing about the mass media for a good many years and now you're an object of the mass media. How has that changed your view of it, if at all?

McLuhan

Well, let me instead explain why this has happened. Have you noticed that the mood of North America has suddenly changed very drastically. Things like the safety car could not have happened ten years ago.

Fulford

Why is that?

McLuhan

Well, it is because people have suddenly become obsessed with the consequences of things. They used to be obsessed with mere products and packages and launching these things out into markets and into the public. Now they have suddenly become concerned about what happens when these things go out onto the highway and what happens when this kind of program gets on the air. They want safety air, safety cigarettes, safety cars and safety programming. This need for safety is a sudden awareness that things have effects. Now my writing has for years been concerned with the effects of things – not their impact - but their consequences after impact.

Unlike the fantasy and escape world of the movies, TV creates the enormously serious and realistic-minded sort of person who is almost Oriental in his inward meditateness.

Fulford This is the teenager of today?

McLuhan Yes, he is becoming almost Oriental in his inwardness.

Fulford He is so thoughtful and serious.

McLuhan Yes, he is grim. Whereas the movie generations of the twenties and thirties were a coon-coated bunch of superficial types who had a good time and went to college but not for knowledge. All has changed.

Fulford And changed because of television?

McLuhan Yes, to a great degree television gave the old electric circuitry that was already here a huge extra push in the direction of involvement and inwardness. You see the circuit doesn't simply push things out for inspection. It also pushes you into the circuit. It involves you. When you put a new medium into play in a given population, all its sensory life shifts a bit. It sometimes shifts a lot. This changes its outlook, attitudes, feelings about study, about school and about politics. Since the advent of TV, Canadian and British and American politics have cooled off almost to the point of rigor mortis. Our politics require much more hotting up than the TV medium will give them. TV is ideal when you get two experts like ourselves discussing it. This is good TV because there is a process going on of mutual challenge, discovery and processing. TV is good for that. It is the same with ads. If the audience can become involved in the actual process of making the ad, then it is happy. It's like the old quiz shows. They were great TV because they gave the audience a role and something to do. The audience was horrified when it discovered that it really been left out all the time because the shows were rigged. This was a horrible misunderstanding of TV on the part of the programmers.

In the same way, most advertisers do not understand the TV me-

dium. Do you know that most people read ads about things they already own? They don't read ads to buy things, but to feel reassured that they have already bought the right thing. In other words, they get huge information satisfaction from ads far more than they do from the product itself. Where advertising is heading is quite simply into a world where the ad will become a substitute for the product and all the satisfactions will be derived informationally from the ad and the product will be merely a number in some file somewhere.

Instead of going out to buy a book that has had five thousand copies printed, you will go to the telephone and describe your interests, your needs and your problems. You might say that you are working on a history of Egyptian arithmetic. You know a bit of Sanscrit. You are qualified in German and you are a good mathematician. In reply you will be told that what you need will be right over. Then, with the help of computers from the libraries of the world, all the latest material is xeroxed just for you personally – not as something to be put out on a bookshelf. Instead, the package is sent to you as a direct personal service. This is where we are heading under electronic information conditions. Products are increasingly becoming services.

Fulford

What kind of world would you rather live in? Is there a period in the past or a possible period in the future you would rather be in?

McLuhan

No, I would rather be in any period at all as long as people are going to leave it alone for awhile.

Fulford

But, they are not going to, are they?

McLuhan

No, and so the only alternative is to understand everything that is going on, and then try to neutralize it as much as possible. Turn off as many buttons as you can and create as much frustration as possible. But, I am resolutely opposed to all innovation and all change, but I am determined to understand what is happening because I do not choose to just let the juggernaut roll over me. Many people seem to think that if you talk about something recent, you are in

favor of it. The exact opposite is true in my case. Anything I talk about is almost certainly to be something I am resolutely against. Therefore, it seems to me that the best way of opposing it is to understand it so that then you know where to turn off the button.