250 Word Response to “The Network is the Message”

The handout from Manuel Castells’ “The Internet Galaxy” contains excerpts from his work that briefly outline some of the history of the Internet and networking, as well as past and current trends in the technologies evolution. Probably one of Castells’ biggest points is how networks are so successful because of their ability to be flexible and adaptable—distributing information with ease. Of course, without the “Internet,” networks would go unnoticed, so its invention was extremely important in exploiting the said technology. Castells covers everything from communication, to commerce, as well as the social ramifications of global networking, but the handout ends with some of the history of the Internet and networking—specifically how the “openness” of the Internet (specifically ARPANET’s architecture and its success with a common international standard), is its main strength.

The internet has changed the way people communicate. Some of the most obvious changes are that people are more “connected” with each other than ever before. The Internet allows for “instant” communication—and networks in general do the same (like cell phone networks for example). While online communication has flourished, through tools such as email, instant messaging, video chats, programs like Skype, and websites, it is the underlying networks that truly allow for global communication. The answer to the question of how the Internet has changed communication is simple: it’s made it instantaneous. Everyone, almost everywhere can “jack in” to a network and be in touch with the world (no mailing letters and waiting a 2 weeks for a reply anymore).

The internet has also impacted social groups and politics. Continuing on with the theme of “instant communication,” I would argue that social groups have always been about networking, and what a better way to continue the purpose than through actual “networks.” The Internet has allowed for social groups and yes, politics as well, to spread and connect with people globally, instantly, and more efficiently than previously possible. Websites that feature chat rooms, blogs, and virtual locations for groups, organizations and more continue to change social psychology.

Lastly, the steady rise of “user generated content” and websites like myspace and youtube are helping to create a new evolutionary branch of the Internet. Some would argue that privacy is becoming less important, and that communication through self expression is the direction that the Internet is taking. While others will recognize the importance of the Internet as a powerful tool for business through e-commerce, the Internet’s original strength (the ability for user control) continues to be evident in web creation today. “Leaderless” organizations like Wikipedia or P2P networks continue to show the success of groups of users working together for success—continuing to show the Internet’s and networks strengths: flexibility and adaptability.