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Abstract

The term "global village" has become almost infamous in the information age. Its originator, Marshall McLuhan, is regarded by some as the most important scholar in media studies and his work is widely known to be ahead of its time. Often his work is even thought of has prophetic, including his discussions of the global village. The internet has brought the ability to send and receive information instantaneously, and many people are quick to connect the internet to a misinterpretation of McLuhan's global village. Unfortunately this connection is often misguided and made without a true understanding of its theoretical origins. Although the internet serves as a vehicle that allows for the instant flow of information, there are important aspects of a global village that it does not address. However, online social networks have brought about some interesting trends in the uses of the internet.

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Introduction

The term "global village" has become almost infamous in the information age. Its originator, Marshall McLuhan, is regarded by some as the most important scholar in media studies and his work is widely known to be ahead of its time. Often his work is even thought of has prophetic, including his discussions of the global village. The internet has brought the ability to send and receive information instantaneously, and many people are quick to connect the internet to a misinterpretation of McLuhan's global village. Unfortunately this connection is often misguided and made without a true understanding of its theoretical origins. Although the internet serves as a vehicle that allows for the instant flow of information, there are important aspects of a global village that it does not address. However, online social networks have brought about some interesting trends in the uses of the internet.

The rise of popular online social networks such as Facebook has seen the collapse of time and space barriers of human interaction. Facebook, along with other online social networks, have roots in North America, but their popularity has since extended across international waters. Human interaction and the collapse of time and space barriers across international waters conjure up some new connections between online social networks and the global village. Are online social networks, such as Facebook, one of McLuhan's prophecies about the global village, or are they merely just a fad brought about by the internet and soon to be replaced by the next big thing? Have we finally seen McLuhan's global village come to fruition? In order to answer this question, I will examine literature to develop an appropriate framework of McLuhan's global village, the internet, and online social networks. This framework will then be used to inform a content analysis of international "friends" on Facebook. With these two works coming together I hope to discover if online social networks, such as Facebook, are bringing about the global village or merely a misguided usage of the term.

Literature Review

The following review will discuss literature covering four issues. First, I will be exploring the term "global village" and examine key readings featuring the theory. Next I will examine key themes of the internet, drawing connections on theories of a global village. Thirdly, I will narrow my research, observing theories of new media and its connections with the internet. Finally I will finish with observations of popular sources with respect to the online social network Facebook.

What is a global village?

The term global village is often aimlessly used, and often misused, to explain the current state of today's society. When paraphrasing Marshall McLuhan, who coined the phrase, Laughey defines the basics of a global village as follows: "we no longer live in tribal villages in the literal sense, but in the metaphorical sense electrical media have expanded our horizons to such an extent that we feel a vicarious intimacy with people and places all over the world" (2007: 36). Furthermore, the global village exists due to technologies that eliminate distances between people, moving us toward a world consciousness (McLuhan and Powers, 1989: 90). McLuhan further divulges that these new technologies infiltrate human lives so immensely that the human family exists entirely under the conditions of a global village (McLuhan, 1962: 31) and that the global village has repatterned how humans interpret our very identity because of the instant involvement of each of us in all people (McLuhan, 2006: 233).

The global village not only brings the world to us, but takes us to the rest of the world; "His (man's) body will remain in one place but his mind will float out into the electronic void, being everywhere at once" (McLuhan and Powers, 1989: 97). The global village means that humans are everywhere and have the ability to interact with any person on the face of the globe (McLuhan and Powers, 1989: 118). This is possible due to the global village's ability to diminish time and space. As van Dijk points out, societies of the past have been based on the ability to interact with people in close proximity of one another, being bound by space and time (2006: 157). The societies of the global village are no longer bound by these restrictions. "Modern societies stretch further and further across time and space […] with the introduction of global networks reaching into every home, the process of time-space distantiation seems to be approaching its limit […] distance and time seem to lose any relevance" (van Dijk, 2006: 157). Van Dijk further explains that being physically in one place while virtually being in others gives us a new perspective; "[aided] by information and communication technology, these coordinates of existence can be transcended to create virtual times and places and to simultaneously act, perceive, and think in global and local terms" (van Dijk, 2006: 36).

The Internet: The Vehicle of the Global Village

During the time of its inception, the global village was still in need of a vehicle to make it a reality. The internet has seen itself become the optimal network from which the global village has developed. Van Dijk defines a network as a "collection of links between elements of a unit […] networks are a mode of organization of complex systems in nature and society" (2006: 24). As van Dijk further explains networking in society consists of individuals creating ties with family members, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, colleagues, etc. and the internet has not only supported this but has intensified it with the existence of instantaneous flows of information over large spaces (2006: 25). Fleras also agrees with this conclusion stating that "the internet has also laid the basis for a new kind of interconnected ("networked") society, one that allows people to become more deeply immersed" (2003: 246). Correlating with van Dijk's definition of a network, Fleras describes the internet not as a specific place or thing but as construct of millions of servers linked together, often metaphorically described as a net or web because of all the interconnected links (2003: 251). Van Dijk expands on this notion stating that "the internet has created a vast hyperlink structure of sources and artifacts of human activity" (2006: 26).

But what is drawing the individuals to the integrated network of the internet? The simple answer is communication. More specifically, as outlined by van Dijk, it is the internet's ability to exist beyond space and time, being able to bridge large distances at top speeds in terms of communication, just as outlined in McLuhan's global village (2006: 14). "Using the internet and email, one is able to

send a message to the other side of the world within one minute. Face-to-face communication and print media are only able to connect quickly to proximate others" states van Dijk (2006: 15), proving the revolutionary communication aspect of the internet.

As discussed earlier, McLuhan felt that the global village would bring immense change in society and human identity (2006: 233), which Fleras believes to be true of the internet. "Everything we used to do, we do differently because of the internet. Internet communication is redefining how people relate to the world out there, both physical and human, by radically defining how information is processed and distributed" (Fleras, 2003: 251). In further descriptions, Fleras tells that the internet is responsible for the instantaneous access to vast amounts of information just as McLuhan stressed the instantaneous ability that is employed by the global village (2003: 233). Fleras further describes the internet's affect as profoundly altering human communication, redesigning the way we socialize and interact, promoting the free flow of information across international borders (2003: 246-247). Fleras even goes as far as saying that the internet is so embedded in society and regular, day-to-day life that it would be unimaginable to live without it (2003: 246) and that it may have ushered in an era of communication and interaction that rivals the invention of the printing press (2003: 250).

New Media: Making the Internet Interactive

As previously mentioned, Flera states that the internet is just servers linked together (2003: 251) and nothing else, so something must be opening the internet to the possibility of worldwide communication. As McLuhan points out, the global village will be interactive (1962: 128), so something must be supplying the means for interactivity. Van Dijk gives a brief definition of interactivity as being a sequence of action and reaction (2006: 8). New media is that source of interactivity available on the internet. With previous media, the flow of communication was one-way, but new media offers the action/reaction relationship outlined by van Dijk, thus making it interactive (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin, 2006: 240). Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin describe new media as "those methods and social practices of communication, representation, and expressions that have developed using the digital, multimedia, networked computer and the ways that this machine is held to have transformed work in other media" (2006: 236). New media is also characterized by the digitization of media, allowing for greater storage capacity and speed across long distances, enhancing the quality and type of communication that occurs on the internet (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin, 2006: 238). New media can take several different forms on the internet, including chat rooms, forums, blogs, online social networks, and email (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin, 2006: 240-244). Although blogs have proven themselves to be a very popular means of communication on the internet (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin, 2006: 245) online social networks have proven to be something unique, where a wealth of information is provided through a two-way communication model. As Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin point out, social networks "offer a way to create far more sophisticated and nuanced human interaction than those provided by a personal Web page or its more interactive kin, the blog (2006: 244). Online social networks have proven to be immensely popular, drawing millions of users all over the world and fostering new kinds of social conversations (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin, 2006: 244).

Facebook: The World's Online Social Network (or Maybe Not?)

The one online social network that has proven to generate the most users around the world is Facebook. One in five worldwide internet users are Facebook members; it had 222 million unique visitors in December 2008, and has had a steady user growing rate of more than 10% per month since September 2008, numbers that are unmatched against its other competitors such as MySpace

(Learmonth and Klaasen, 2009). Although Facebook has changed the way people communicate, there are disagreements as to whether this change is positive or negative. As David Smith discusses in his article on online social networks, one in five young people said they preferred to talk to friends online rather than in person, diminishing face-to-face communication while others point out that the multimedia capabilities of Facebook enhance face-to-face communication because people want to go out, meet up with friends and take photos so that they can upload them onto their profiles (Smith, 2008). There are also disagreements about the global reach of Facebook itself. In 2007, studies had shown that Facebook was the leading online social network in Canada, but there are plenty of other leaders in other nations, such as Friendster, hi5, and Orkut (Denton, 2007). This creates a localization effect rather than globalization, generating much regional connectedness but limited international interaction (Geist, 2007). With multiple online social networks becoming more and more popular in certain regions, it is increasingly less likely that the connection will extend across borders.

Literature Review Conclusion

Marshall McLuhan felt that a global village was inevitable, where the world would feel as if it was one large village due to the compression of time and space through electronic media (McLuhan and Powers, 1989: 90). The internet has brought about worldwide connection, connecting all of society (Fleras, 2003: 246) and new media has brought about a new way for humans to communicate and interact with one another over the internet (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Boin, 2006: 240). Facebook has quickly become one of the most popular forms of new media but it is unclear whether it is enhancing worldwide communication or purely just local (Learmonth and Klaasen 2009; Geist 2007). Therefore, this research will attempt to discover if online social networks are bringing about Marshall McLuhan's global village.

Methodology

To answer this research question, I have decided it would be best to perform a quantitative study of my Facebook "friends" examining the amount of international "friends" they have on their list. The most appropriate method of gathering this information is via content analysis. The reason I have chosen a content analysis as my method is because it is highly objective, unobtrusive, and it is flexible (Bryman and Teevan, 2005). With the content analysis, I could easily accumulate the amount of international "friends" that my Facebook "friends" have without having to question each individual person. In turn, this allowed me to examine a larger population in the hopes of obtaining a wider variety of findings. A content analysis has allowed me to quickly quantify a large amount of data concerning the amount of international "friends" on Facebook. The measurement of these international human connections will help determine if online social networks are creating a global village.

I chose to examine the international "friends" of 50 male "friends" and 50 female "friends" found on my Facebook list, all from Canada, chosen at random. I decided to break up the information by gender to see if there is any correlation. I also examined the regions that these international "friends" were from so that I could observe any trends. Seeing that I am "friends" with all 100 of these participants, Facebook allows me to view all of the "friends" that they have on their list. I then selected to view "all friends" where Facebook allows me to arrange their "friends" list by regions. Regions are determined by the user when setting up their account and are used to specify what area of the world the person is from. For some nations, regions are distinguished by cities and provinces/states, while others are simply categorized by the nation itself. Facebook includes a drop-down menu that organizes the user's "friends" by the amount populated by each region. By making use of this feature supplied by the Facebook interface, I was able to both quickly determine if the user had

international "friends" or not and where these international "friends" were located. Because I was dealing with a large quantity of numbers, all calculations were triple-checked to ensure accuracy.

Although I did not include my own personal list of international "friends" in the original analysis, I came across an interesting aspect to my "friends" list where some of my Canadian "friends" were also listed under a different, international region. I felt that this is an interesting phenomenon that should also be included in my analysis. Therefore, I examined my list of regional Canadian "friends" and then examined which of those "friends" were also categorized by a separate international region. Because users are not required to designate a specific region in their Facebook profile, I also compared those two numbers to the total amount of "friends" found on my list, whether categorized by region or not.

I have also taken the time to ensure that my method of analysis and the use of the Facebook user information do not contain any ethical issues. Firstly, the users whose "friends" lists were examined are not identified throughout the study and the international "friends" found on their respective lists are not identified throughout the study as well. Secondly, by agreeing to Facebook's Terms of Use (Facebook, 2008), the users have agreed to have this information publicly available to those found on their "friends" list, which includes myself. And finally, my use of this material does not violate any code found on Facebook's Terms of Use because I was not soliciting personal information from users under the age of 18 for commercial or unlawful purposes (Facebook, 2008). This analysis has also proven to be quite reliable. Although it is possible that slightly different results could be found when observing the specific populations and subsequent regions, I believe that when randomly analyzing Canadian Facebook users, similar trends will remain existent.

The most considerable amount of problems comes with the validity of the analysis. In a simple respect, the analysis is valid because it is quantifying the amount of international relationships amongst Facebook users which will identify the amounts of connection between people around the world. The problem is that this analysis does not measure the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the actual communication happening between the two international users. Laughey stated that a global village is existent when we feel an intimacy with people from around the world (2007: 36), but the analysis does not examine the type of communication between the users nor does it even examine if there is any communication happening at all between the users. There is also some concern over the use of Facebook and the regional aspects of the personal profile. As mentioned earlier, there seems to be a phenomenon with users categorizing themselves in a region that they do not live in. This has a possibility of damaging my findings because when observing the international "friends" of my "friends", there is currently no way to distinguish between those actually living in those regions and those simply abiding to the region while living in another. And finally, as discussed earlier, Facebook does not require users to distinguish a region in their profile. This could also damage my numbers because international users that are not identified as international would not have been included in my analysis. This means that there is a possibility that the results found are not a true representation of the international "friends".

Information/Data

The results found were astounding. Of the 100 users that were analyzed, only one was not "friends" with an international user (see fig.2). Overall, a total of 1761 international "friends" were connected to the 100 users examined. The 1761 international "friends" represented 95 different nations (see fig.4). Specifically, I was surprised to find that all seven continents were represented, including one international "friend" from Antarctica. One aspect that was not particularly shocking was that an overwhelming majority of international "friends" were from the United States of America (see fig.1). The U.S. was followed by England and then Australia for having the second and third
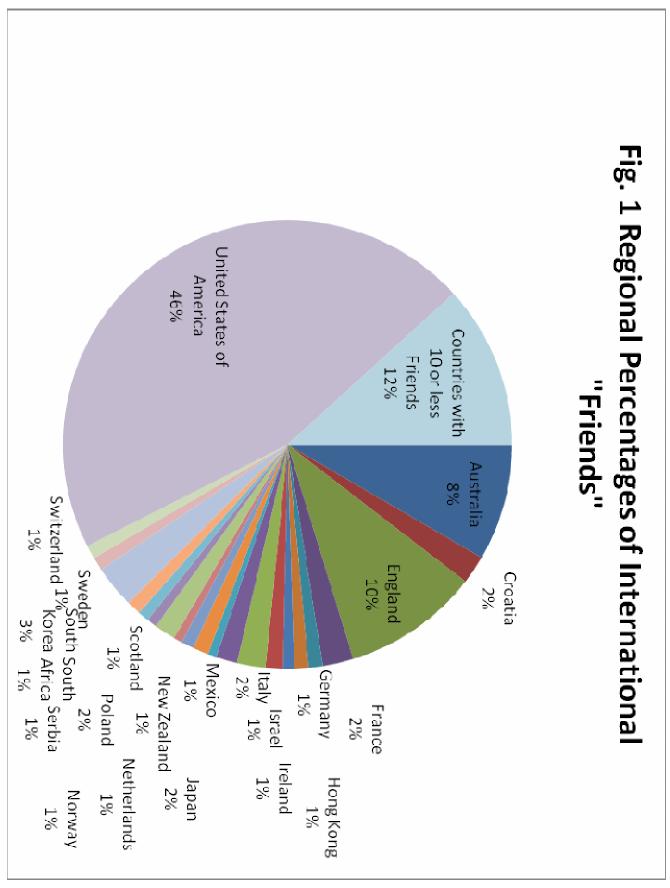
most international "friends". Also, it is interesting to note that of the 95 countries, 73 of them had 10 or less international "friends", including 34 countries that had only one international "friend". Therefore, although many nations were represented, they were not necessarily represented in an abundance of numbers.

In the examination of my "friends" list, I found that there were a few whose region was listed as being from both Canada and another nation. Of the 313 total "friends", 216 of them have their regions listed as within Canada, and four of those have their regions listed within Canada and in another nation (see fig.3). Therefore there is not a large amount of users designating themselves to different regions, but there are still a few who do, so the phenomenon is worth noting.

Analysis/Discussion

When analyzing the amount of Facebook users that have international "friends", the overwhelming majority do, with only one of 100 users not having an international "friend". There also seems to be no correlation between gender and international "friends", as 49 males and 50 females had international "friends", for a total of 99 out of 100. These findings on their own seems fairly convincing that online social networks are creating a global village, but further investigation of the other findings seem to prove otherwise. It could be assumed that the reason for the vast majority (46%) of the international "friends" came from the U.S. is simply due to geographical proximity. Because Canada is notably closest to the U.S. than any other nation, it seems likely that there is more of a chance for friends to exist across borders due to exterior factors such as travelling, thus continuing or extending the relationship via Facebook. Another notable aspect is that the top three nations are all English speaking, like Canada, therefore it seems quite obvious that the top nations that Canadian Facebook users are "friends" with are all English speaking nations. This allows for easier communication, which would also make it easier for a Facebook "friendship" to be established and upheld. When examining the amount of international "friends" (1761) and the amount of nations represented (95) it seems convincing that online social networks are bringing about some form of global village, but the division of these populations is not as convincing. 73 of these nations have 10 or less international "friends" while 34 of those had only one international "friend". This is evidence of Facebook being wide-reaching but does not support the idea of a global village because the amount of connections are few and far between. It must also be taken into consideration that Facebook has been quite popular in North American for a few years now, so perhaps it is still in its beginning stages in the other countries and it is too soon to pass these subsequent numbers off as being indiscriminate. The fact remains that 1761 international "friends" from 95 different countries on all seven continents is still quite a feat, so perhaps it might be useful for further investigation after some time has passed.

The main problems with this analysis exist within the validity. Because I was unable to incorporate quantitative and qualitative methods in observing the actual communication between international "friends", the intimacy that is associated with the global village cannot be appropriately addressed. I believe that this content analysis supplemented with interviews or surveys addressing the quality and type of communication between international "friends" would generate a much clearer conclusion and better address the research question. Furthermore, the problems existing within the Facebook profiles, where users are not forced to be subject to any specific region or where users are free to associate themselves with any region they wish has the potential of drastically affecting the results. My analysis found that only 1.9% of my regional "friends" were also members of other international regions, which could be extrapolated to assume that a minimal amount such as 1.9% affected the other results. The fact remains that there was no way for me to check this with the method of analysis.

Fig. 1 Regional Percentages of International "Friends"

Developing ways of checking this seems quite complicated and perhaps would require clarification from the participant themselves through interviews or surveys.

Conclusion

Out of 100 Facebook users, there were 1761 international "friends" from 95 different countries on all seven continents. Out of 100 Facebook users, only one did not have an international "friend". At the same time, 73 of the 95 nations had 10 international "friends" or less, with 34 having only one international "friend". Although these findings do not fully support that online social networks are bringing about McLuhan's global village, they do seem to be taking us that much closer. It can be easily argued that there is certainly a lot more international interaction via Facebook and other online social networks, so they seem to be leading us in the right direction towards a global village; we just have not reached it yet. Future studies examining the quality and type of communication between international "friends" and a similar content analysis examining any changes in international trends could help answer this ongoing question. It seems as though the global village is something yet to be completely revealed, but if trends continue to grow, a clearer perspective will soon come into play.

Appendices – Coding Sheets

Figure 2 – Amount of "Friends" with International "Friends"		
	Males	Females
Do Have International "Friends"	49	50
Do Not Have International "Friends"	1	0
Total	**50**	**50**

Figure 3 – Personal Canadian "Friends" Also Listed Under Different Regions	
Amount of Canadian "Friends"	216
Amount of Canadian "Friends" Also Listed Under a Different Region	4 (1.9%)
Total Amount of "Friends" (including regional and non-regional)	313

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