

BOOK REVIEW

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GROWN UP DIGITAL: HOW THE NET GENERATION IS CHANGING YOUR WORLD

by Don Tapscott,
McGraw-Hill, 2008. ISBN 0-07-150863-5.

Don Tapscott is a Canadian business executive, author, consultant and speaker, specializing in business strategy, organizational transformation and the role of technology in business and society. He was founder and chairman of the international think tank New Paradigm before its acquisition. In World Business Forum 2013, Tapscott stated that today the Internet provides access to real-time global intelligence and described the four strategies that rules today's leadership: the technological revolution, the Net Generation, and the economic and social revolution.

The book I am going to present here it has mainly the same topic as his 2013 presentation. As far as more people on the street or on the transportation means are spending more and more time talking with other people who are not physically present, the nature of public spaces and other aspects of social geography is changing. Some of these changes will bring benefits to the society; increasing its welfare... some will erode it. I will present here both points of view.

Firstly we should answer to the following questions: *What people have to gain from the virtual communities? What makes them continue to share information with people who probably will not ever meet face to face?* Marc A. Smith's answer, cited in Grown Up Digital by D. Tapscott was: "social network capital, knowledge capital and some adepts, friends or fans" - people can put a little of what they know and what they feel on the on-line networks and can extract bigger amounts of knowledge, catching opportunities by socializing in areas in they invested. Tapscott continued by adding: "Smart" mobile platforms if are used with care and responsibility – in order to minimize as many of the above effects, will lead to revolutionizing the term "future".

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We will not set the time and place to meet with our friends but “we will speak on the phone [about it]” or “[I’ll] tell you where to find me!”

In this mobile culture, everyone lives with one foot in the future, using cell phone to manage its future, meetings and stuff. Places and time are not planned in advance; people prefer to agree to call (it often goes without saying) <when I get there>. This makes life less strict, since it is possible to arrange every day by the events that we may be part of.

The mobile phones are maintaining a flexible life, allowing us to arrange meetings in a convenient way... they are jamming all previous structure established till now changing it into a more flexible direction. This reveals a change in the way we perceive time, the idea of an anticipated future is replaced by a sense of time that is reported consistently in the future. The future is not conceived as something which consists only in some precise moment, but as the time and places that are open to negotiation depending on the situation."

It is appearing here an effect called the “fax machine effect” or the “law of plenitude” - a very radical notion¹⁹. In the traditional economy, the value comes from scarcity. Conventional “wealth icons” - diamonds, gold - are valuable because they are rare. When something limited becomes abundantly - as happened with oil in the 80's and 90's – it loses value. But with the networks the logic is antagonistic. Now, the strength and value comes from abundance. The more and more visitors you have on your website, the more you add more people to your network, the more it becomes stronger: it is the ultimate tool for easy manufacture of such personal networks.

Theoretically, the fact that everyone has a mobile phone makes the network very strong. The fact of being a part of a large network can be a wonderful thing and, theoretically, the more extensive the network is, the stronger it is. But as the network grows, expenses are growing as well for each member of it, which means a lot of time lost and extra hassle (most phone calls that we answer are given in order to provide help rather than received it). Therefore, people do not talk usually to those who call to sell products over the phone or to respond to market studies, and this is why we pay a lot of attention to the caller ID, in order to select the calls. Telephone network is so large and so impossible to watch, and because of that we begin to be interested in using it in a selective way. So... we become immune to the phone. Is the situation with the e-mail different? Probably not! I remember when I created my first email account, in the late 90s. I remember hurrying home very excited, connecting the modem and discovering that I have four messages from four good friends. What I used

¹⁹ Wolfram Schmidgen (2002), *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property*, “Henry Fielding and the common law of plenitude”, Cambridge University Press, pp. 63-103

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do immediately was writing long and elegant replies. Now, of course I wake up in the morning, go to the computer and found sixty-four posts and the impatience that once I felt has now been replaced by horror. I receive unnecessary and unwanted messages, all kinds of stories and jokes circulating around; people I don't have too much to tell ask me to do things I do not want to. How do I respond? I compose a very, very short message - rarely more than two sentences - and often it takes two or three days to answer them; and to many posts I do not respond at all. I guess I am not the only one in this situation; I'm just one of the millions of the e-mail users worldwide. As long as we get so many e-mail messages our answers are becoming shorter, more selective and more traditional. These symptoms are defined by D. Tapcott as symptoms of immunity.

So, when we see so many dangers, threats and uncertainties related to smart technology, why we should invest in it?

The answer is the same that would have been given to the same question asked when language, writing and printing were discovered: the creation of knowledge technologies and their application on an increasingly greater scale based on cooperation is linked deeply to humans. Cognitive scientist Andy Clark, cited as well in this book, believes that people have become cyborgs, "not in the superficial sense of combining flesh with wires, but in a deepest sense, in a human-technology symbiosis: thinking and reasoning systems are spread across biological brain and non-biological circuits."

It would be a big mistake to try to set "the human nature" to what people were before, because "our brains are [by nature] unusually flexible mechanisms whose proper biological functionality always involved recruiting and exploring non-biological props."

New information technologies, in general - not just money and writing - often decentralizes power and this is not accepted graciously by those who have power in practice. So, by that, we find certain amount of historical turbulence, including today.