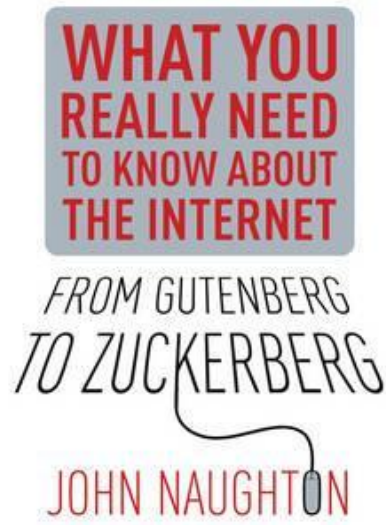


'A fantastic read and a marvel of economy...
This is the kind of primer you want
to slide under your boss's door.'
Cory Doctorow, Observer



From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet

John Naughton

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From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet

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From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet John Naughton
Our society has gone through a weird, unremarked transition: we've gone from regarding the Net as something exotic to something that we take for granted as a utilitarian necessity, like mains electricity or running water. In the process we've been remarkably incurious about its meaning, significance or cultural implications. Most people have no idea how the network works, nor any conception of its architecture; and few can explain why it has been - and continues to be - so uniquely disruptive in social, economic and cultural contexts. In other words, our society has become dependent on a utility that it doesn't really understand. John Naughton has distilled the noisy chatter surrounding the internet's relentless evolution into nine clear-sighted and accessible areas of understanding. In doing so he affords everyone the requisite knowledge to make better use of the technologies and networks around us, and see lucidly into their future implications. Along the way FROM GUTENBERG TO ZUCKERBERG covers areas as diverse as the science of complexity, the economics of abundance, the appeal of disruption and the problematic nature of intellectual property. FROM GUTENBERG TO ZUCKERBERG gives you all the basic, conceptual equipment you need to understand the Internet phenomenon.

From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet Details

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From Reader Review From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet for online ebook

Sara says

Commodifying the remote word – from Gutenberg to Zuckerberg

[Through my ratings, reviews and edits I'm providing intellectual property and labor to Amazon.com Inc., listed on Nasdaq, which fully owns Goodreads.com and in 2014 posted revenues for \$90 billion and a \$271 million loss. Intellectual property and labor require compensation. Amazon.com Inc. is also requested to provide assurance that its employees and contractors' work conditions meet the highest health and safety standards at all the company's sites].

The average, basic, uncritical book, worshiping Google and Steve Jobs, but with some useful insight into the history of internet technology.

But then the internet and its veneer of “contents”, the world wide web, are important, aren't they? Without them, no GR, no user-generated reviews, and me just a reader keeping her thoughts to herself. Instead, I've been promoted to commodity-reader, an anonymous content provider of low quality stuff that added to the low quality stuff of the millions on GR gives rise to an awesome revenue-generating tower of babel of page views (please see my pathetic disclaimer above).

Anyway, what's Gutenberg got to do with it? Marshall McLuhan (The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man) is not cited here, even if it's him who invented Gutenberg as we know it, and carried away by his visionary intellectual powers, saw the world wide web – the legendary ‘global village’ – before it came about in its current dry, coded appearance. McLuhan already thought the media were making us post-human, but this is not down to Gutenberg.

If we take the long view, as the author suggests at the beginning, we see Gutenberg disrupting a culture of the remote, written word (on which Christianity had built its empire) introducing low quality stuff - the cheap, mechanical, mindless copy of the Bible. The written word becomes even more remote, more separate from the author, the copier, the commentator, the preacher. It's commodified, alienated, fetishized – or, as we are now delighted to say, not knowing what we are talking about, democratized. Gutenberg initiated the commodification process of the written word. It took centuries to institutionalize the book industry, to make it authoritative again, as at the times of the Benedictine monasteries. Now it's us that are commodified - the readers.

Another new feature that Gutenberg brought about is illiteracy: another dimension along which create social order. Shame on those who cannot digest the dry, commodified word. The internet revolution provides yet another tool of exclusion: shame on those whose knowledge cannot be googled, shame on those – the billions - who cannot google.

The author does cite Neil Postman, who in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* said that “there are two ways in which the spirit of a culture may be shriveled. In the first – the Orwellian – culture becomes a prison. In the second – the Huxleyean – culture becomes a burlesque”. The problem here is that the book – and all the debates about the internet – take exclusively the internal view of the internet natives. Is the government spying us as we google? Are we becoming stupid by watching Youtube? What's the future of the copyright? These are marginal issues. What matters is that there is an inside and an outside of the world wide web, and no thought is given to the destiny of the vast global majority who does not even get a chance to be commodified, as the technological infrastructure and the digital literacy required to access is and will remain beyond their reach for generations, or forever.

So as an alternative to Tim Berners-Lee's vision of a data-mining Web 3.0, and an antidote to both the Orwellian and Huxleyean shriveling, we should hope for a web in which we are de-commodified, a digital environment rich of things that cannot be googled, rich of people who do not want to be googled, or followed, or liked – where adventures and discoveries are not predetermined, or PageRanked, where chance is still a possibility, and “information” takes another meaning.

Silvia Mansoor says

It's a good book. It's a bit technical at times, but it's not a difficult read. I'd recommend it. The author starts out talking about disruptive technologies in general, but focuses on the Internet for the majority of the book. There are so many things about the Internet and the web that I didn't know before reading this book. The author does well to put everything in perspective as well. For instance, the Internet is still new! A lot of us (especially millennials) may feel like it has always been around, but it hasn't. The fact that we have been able to innovate so much with it in such a short timespan is mind-boggling. The author also takes a decent amount of time towards the end of the book to focus on copyright. I appreciated that. Again, I'd recommend the book.

Vicky says

I thought this book was really informative and a good read, so please don't let the three stars put you off - I'm comparing it to novels which have moved me.

It kind of mixes up sociology - specifically the impact upon technology on society - from the huge changes that occurred following the invention of the printing press to the changes and unknown future of the internet. Will it be a Orwellian future (big brother) or Huxellian (excess pleasure)- the author decides it's a combination of both.

But also it does inform me a little bit about what the Internet is! I guess I always thought it was magic. Also how the internet evolved and was invented. The history of telecommunications and why the fact that there is no central control stops the monopoly seen by the old telephone giants, which makes it open to innovation.

Great informative book! Well worth a read. It took me a while and I read it by dipping in, whilst reading more gripping novels at the same time.

Toofan says

3.5 stars

Audio-book: audio quality : excellent/ Narration: Excellent

It is well written and easy to follow but unfortunately very shallow. It is more like a short history of the internet rather than any explanation on how it works.

I enjoyed this book but I would have loved more in depth explanation on almost all covered topics.

I guess that at some point I am going to re-read a printed or digital version of this book and research each and every topic that captures my attention thoroughly.

Steve says

An interesting review of the disruption of technology, starting with Gutenberg and getting to Facebook's Zuckerberg. Neil Postman, Orwell, and Huxley all fit into portions of the narrative. Definitely worth a read. The prose is simple, the questions raised are significant. Sort of like the pigs who end up being the first among equals on an Orwellian farm, it isn't clear if we will get what we have promised out of the network that began at ARPANet.

K.M. Herkes says

Preface: I am on a never-ending quest to keep my brain from turning to mush under the weight of the pop culture I bury it in. I attempt one non-fiction book a month in an effort to Always Be Learning. I do always learn. Sometimes it's a slog. Sometimes it's fun.

On my food-based analogy review scale, this book gets a solid "Potluck dinner with friends on a summer evening. With beers." It offers lots of different dishes from different origins, some of which don't go well with others, but the atmosphere is friendly and non-judgmental. There are laughs as well as serious moments, and best of all, you'll find yourself trying hard to remember all the insightful comments that were made during the long evening.

The premise --How the Internet Is Changing Everything-- could've been a drag, or pretentious, but John Naughton does a great job discussing prior disruptive technological innovations and drawing useful comparisons between them and the Internet. He also acknowledges that we won't really understand the changes happening now for decades or even centuries to come.

The writing style was chatty and refreshing, and he backed up his speculation with ample historical and sociological data. I never felt he was talking down to me, but he never tried to impress me with Academic Verbiage either. This is the kind of writing I was hoping to find in Gladwell's David & Goliath. Too bad it wasn't there.

I always check for an index and a solid bibliography, since I am inclined towards binge research, and this has a great examples of both.

I recommend this to anyone who makes a living in or around the tech world, to anyone who likes history, and anyone who likes pondering how our inventions change our lives.

Dane Cobain says

I found this book in a bargain bin at The Works, which just goes to show that you can find great stuff in bargain bins – this book is, without a doubt, one of the best books that I've ever read about the internet. How much you enjoy it will probably depend upon how much you used the internet in the early days – there's some great stuff about the founding of Napster, for example, that you'll only really relate to if you used it the first time around.

Napster itself was only made possible by both the internet itself and the creation of the mp3 encoding format, two subjects that Naughton explains eloquently and in detail. If you're a bit of a computer geek like I am then you'll probably enjoy it, but it might be a bit too much if you're not interested in the inner workings of the computers and networks that power our civilization.

Of particular interest is Naughton's comparison of the internet to the Gutenberg press, another invention which revolutionised the way that we communicate. In fact, he begins the book by covering off the invention and adoption of the Gutenberg press and the way in which it changed the world for the better – the internet, he argues, will have a similar effect over time.

It's also interesting to read Naughton's views on the copyright culture that we live in, a set of views that I happen to share – I won't go in to them in too much detail because I suggest that you go out and buy a copy of the book for yourself. Naughton also has some interesting ideas when it comes to predictions of the future – he looks at the dystopian futures proposed by Orwell and Huxley, and explains why they could both be right when it comes to their depressing view of what our society might become.

All in all, this book is a pleasure to read and a must-have for anyone who's a regular user of the internet. So check it out!

Fay says

Interesting overview of the history of the internet, including sections on copyright law and privacy issues. Naughton draws parallels from the way the development of printing presses changed society several hundred years ago, in ways that were impossible to predict at the time.

The book was only published in 2012 but the chapter on surveillance already seems somewhat dated given the ongoing controversy around Edward Snowden's revelations, which the author could not have foreseen. However he has very little to say about the issue of big businesses tracking peoples' browsing habits and scanning emails, and the way this information can be used and/or abused depending on your viewpoint. This has been a known issue for several years now, and it stands out to me as quite a glaring omission.

There was also very little about the way open source software and operating systems have become much more user-friendly and accessible to ordinary people over the last few years; including the option for anyone to run their own server from home without expensive machines or having to spend years acquiring specialist knowledge. I'll be curious to see what effect this has in the future, and whether it reverses the current trend of all the data on the internet becoming concentrated in the hands of a few powerful vested interests.

With those gaps aside, this book still has some very useful perspectives to offer.

Titus Hjelm says

I got this as an add-on to another audiobook I bought. As a luddite I thought it might be time to learn something about the net. The book didn't disappoint in the technical details--it's basically a summary of important thinking on the subject in the last thirty years. Even in audiobook format, the narrative was easy to follow, the stories illustrated the points well and so on. But when it comes to social analysis, the book lapses

into Wired-type techie hype, simplistic idealism ('ideas run society' or something) and laissez-faire gobbledygook. There is not a word about digital inequality nor any serious engagement with why people might be upset about copy infringement. Good, clear tech stuff (for beginners at least), much less impressive on the social side.

Rob says

A history of the Internet by an early adopter (best-known perhaps for his articles in the Guardian) and plain speaker, well-written and fascinating, if perhaps a little too tightly chained to a popularising aim.

Here we get talk of its inherent disruptions and histories of the ARPAnet, email, digital music, copyright, the Cloud etc. A no-nonsense narrator weighing up the various sides in certain controversies, Naughton is highly readable and keenly forthright. The book fairly flies by. Of course, with the pace of developments in this field he may need more-or-less yearly updates, to it and some of his pronouncements and forecasts are hostages to the time that has elapsed since they were made.

But overall he finds an appealing balance between a knowledge of pop culture, a technical background and a philosophical kitbag of questions needing to be at least considered by all of us addicted to this primrose superhighway to hell.

Meg says

Interesting, I especially liked the conception of communication media through the framework of ecology rather than economics and a few other points. I disagreed with some of the authors he quotes on authorship pre-Gutenberg and a few other absolutist sounding statements that he quotes. I loved the history of the internet bits best. He doesn't, in the end, offer a future-telling of the impact of the internet but rather shows how the infrastructure effects our interactions with it, the fears of utopia/dystopia, and the potential lifecycle that will impact the internet's future use through mobile + the large companies which mediate our experiences online. Very thinky, some argueing, would recommend.

Anetq says

Excellent run-through of the 9 most important ideas about the internet:

- 1) Take the long view!
- 2) The Web is not the Net (super short chapter, points for keeping it short & simple!)
- 3) For the Net, disruption is a feature, not a bug
- 4) Think ecology, not just economics
- 5) Complexity is the new reality
- 6) The network is now the computer
- 7) The Web is evolving
- 8) Copyrights Vs. "copywrongs": or why our intellectual property regime no longer makes sense
- 9) Orwell Vs. Huxley: The bookends of our networked future

- So there, just memorize the list! No really: read the book, it's a great and easy read, explaining both the ideas, the underlying technologies, thoughts and the people who created them - never patronizing but

enlightening - so even the tech-savvy will learn new stuff, I did.

Hasandi Patriawan says

This book is easy to read, and I recommend to those who don't have a background in IT but interested in technology, especially the internet. The title may be a little bit misleading, but the subtitle says it all. The author's view is easy to follow and although there aren't many specific details (for those of you who have an IT background, this book is quite obvious) I think it's a good knowledge for everyone to have.

Niels says

Tad disappointed about the premises, could be my own fault. Was rather looking for a simple explanation of how the internet works - technically - and the problems and consequences involved. What it rather is, is some short insights into network architecture (but not too much, as I would liked more info on fibre, exchange points etc), but most of it on the cultural significance of our transition into an Internet-era.

Having said and coming to terms with that, some chapters were at some points read with a kind of intrigue (compared to some dull expositions about Internet as a new type of media between all the rest and examples of how powerful a Net-based society can be, which were really too long and obvious). Especially the ones on the Orwell-Huxley divide and cloud computing got me thinking quite a bit. A society that loves technology, loves all the new apps and stuff and completes merges with it, has some obvious advantages to be connected to the world and every piece of information around, but as the Net grows more monopolistic (as one of his central points could be), our cultural freedom or accessibility is diminished and supplied by some big corporations and/or governments (which aren't per definition malevolent). The privacy and security issues this could produce are too neglected or ignored nowadays, which kindof gives the impression that we don't really care, and that we want to give up some degree of privacy (and don't mind being monitored) if this means still being able to use our beloved technology.

Florin Pitea says

Well documented, accessible and clear, as well as relevant. Recommended.
