

The Tea Party movement has succeeded by connecting local groups to the national conversation. Followers relied on new media sites like Facebook and Twitter to follow the movement especially in its infancy.

Because the localized groups were at best loosely connected, they were limited to social media to learn what was happening with similar groups across the country. While large umbrella groups, such as FreedomWorks, were occasionally accused of attempting to dominate the smaller groups, they also provided the needed social media training for groups to be successful in reaching followers. Grassroots groups were able to take off once localized chapters were given the proper tools to share their beliefs, methods, and results.

Impact

Contrary to the predictions of many, the Tea Party had a real impact on the 2010 elections. Whether it was by helping to unseat Democratic senators or forcing moderate Republican hopefuls to become more conservative in their beliefs, the Tea Party showed the potential to be a lasting political force within the nation's politics. Considering that prior to the 2010 elections, the Tea Party had been referred to as a right-wing response to Obama, racist, unsustainable, or not fully committed to its beliefs, it is even more remarkable how the network of local organizations was able to prove naysayers wrong across the country about their possible electoral impact.

Originally deemed an un-American astroturf campaign by Nancy Pelosi, the Tea Party instead helped to usher in the era of Speaker John Boehner and the Republican Party in Washington, D.C. After the rank-and-file Tea Party members were largely dismissed as crazy ideologues, Tea Party candidates were dismissed in much the same manner by the traditional party establishment.

When the more conservative, Tea Party-supported candidates proved victorious in primaries across the country, moderate Republicans realized that they had been stuck in the middle to lose. Without social media, however, the organization may have never grown into the powerful political player it is today. While Barack Obama waged a successful social media campaign in 2008, Tea Party activities showed Republicans

how they can do the same between his inauguration and the midterm elections.

William J. Miller
Flagler College

See Also: Astroturfing; Bachmann, Michele; Boehner, John; Bottom-Up Campaigns; Campaign Strategy; Campaigns, Congressional (2010); Campaigns, Grassroots; Campaigns, 2012; Christian Right; ContractFromAmerica.org; Political Base; Political Parties.

Further Readings

- Brooks, David. "The Tea Party Teens." *New York Times* (January 5, 2010).
- Cook, Rhodes. "The Tea Party." In *Who Got in the Booth? A Look Back at the 2010 Elections*, Larry Sabato, ed. Boston: Longman, 2011.
- Courser, Zachary. "The Tea Party at the Election." *Forum*, v.8/4 (2010).
- Rasmussen, Scott and Doug Schoen. *Mad as Hell: How the Tea Party Movement Is Fundamentally Remaking Our Two-Party System*. New York: Harper, 2010.
- Rich, Frank. "The Billionaires Bankrolling the Tea Party." *New York Times* (August 28, 2010). http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/29/opinion/29rich.html?_r=0 (Accessed April 2013).
- SourceWatch.org. "Tea Party." http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Tea_Party (Accessed April 2013).
- Teaparty.org. "Tea Party Official Web Site." <http://www.teaparty.org/about-us> (Accessed April 2013).
- Zernike, Kate. "Tea Party Gets Early Start on G.O.P. Targets for 2012." *New York Times* (January 29, 2011).

Technological Determinism

Determinism conceives of the world as fixed and objectified, and therefore predictable; free will is nearly, if not completely impossible, and life options are outside of human control. For instance, biological determinism is a kind of

determinism that suggests that genetic traits dictate how one should live and what one can do. Some people have argued that sex determines the careers a person is (not) allowed to seek (e.g., arguments such as that women are genetically too weak for the military, or that men are genetically incapable of being good caregivers), and that particular traits are natural, unchangeable, and thus uncontrollable for some kinds of people (e.g., aggression and violence in men or emotion and irrationality in women).

Technological determinism is another kind of determinism. Technological determinists work to find direct and causal relationships among a medium/technology, human behavior, and cultural life, and they often focus on the role that a dominant medium plays in a specific era (e.g., writing, printing, television, computing, and smartphones), particularly how the medium influences on cultural change how one relates and lives.

There are two kinds of determinism: hard and soft. Hard determinists make reductionist, causal, and often uncompromising claims about the role and impact of technology on human behavior and cultural life; often, a particular, dominant medium or technology becomes the “sole” cause of social change. Hard determinists might say that books cause individualistic thinking, television makes children violent, smartphones make people less social, and the grammar of texting and text-speak makes people less intelligent. Hard determinists assume that few differences exist in the use of or exposure to dominant technologies, and that cultural change only happens because of these technologies.

Soft determinists offer more tentative and nuanced reads of media and technology; they view media and technology as one factor in, not the sole contributor to, human behavior and social change. For instance, a soft determinist might say that books may cultivate individualistic tendencies, television can contribute to violent actions, smartphones complicate classroom settings and interpersonal relationships, and texting and text-speak changes language, grammar, and spelling in innumerable, unpredictable ways. For a soft determinist, mediation becomes one of the many focuses on how a particular technology influences cultural life.

Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong

The two scholars most closely associated with technological determinism are Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong (a student of McLuhan). McLuhan argued that technologies act as extensions of the human senses—they enhance one’s embodied abilities (e.g., clothes protect us from the weather; glasses allow one to see better/more; cars, trains, and planes collapse space and time) as well as how one relates to/with others (e.g., games promote sociability; clocks promote productivity and punctuality; money quickens exchange; and cars, trains, and planes allow one to be/feel closer to friends and family). McLuhan is also known best for his “the medium is the message” aphorism, which calls attention to the form of a message and indicates deterministic thinking.

For instance, consider a news broadcast about crime. Instead of only analyzing what a reporter said about crime in the broadcast, McLuhan encouraged researchers to investigate how the form—the medium—in which the broadcast appeared (e.g., television, radio, or online) influenced persons’ understandings of the content. A hard determinist read of “the medium is the message” would suggest that one look at nothing else but the medium’s influence on the message—the medium “is” the message and “the” message that matters most. A soft determinist read of “the medium is the message” would suggest that the form and content—the medium “and” the message—are mutually constitutive; a news report about crime may be molded to fit a 30-second time slot on the evening (televised) news, but it is also important to note how the crime was described and what images may have been used. Additionally, the interested viewer may be able to access other coverage of the crime online through news sites, blogs, and video sharing sites like YouTube, with each form modifying the message.

While McLuhan considered the various workings of specific technologies, Ong examined broader cultural changes tied to the invention and use of particular dominant technologies. Specifically, he outlined characteristics of oral cultures (groups that valued storytelling, repetition, and limited vocabularies), literate cultures (groups that valued writing, linear thinking, individualism,

and expanding vocabularies), and electronic cultures (groups that valued storytelling, repetition, writing, linear thinking, and individualism). Ong argued that new technologies do not eliminate the characteristics of earlier technologies; instead, new technologies continue or reframe the use of earlier technologies.

For example, most television and film scripts rely on repetition and redundancy, techniques typically associated with oral cultures. For example, the common mystery movie often requires the repetition of clues so that and can understand how Sherlock Holmes solved the puzzle. However, the plot does not follow a simple chronology as typically expected in an oral text, for example, the producers of *Sherlock Holmes* use literary conventions to heighten suspense—conventions similar to those found in (written) mystery novels. A person may also access the same story through various media. For example, vampires appear in fiction, films, video games, and blogs, as well as in Victorian literature and silent films. Each medium contributes to how a person might understand and interpret vampires.

Technological determinists work to explain how various media aid in the construction of culture, communication, and everyday experience. Currently, most scholars take a soft, inclusive, and nuanced approach to technological determinism, for example, understanding that the existence of television or watching violence on television does not turn people violent; the viewing of violence may help cultivate an orientation toward violent behaviors, but a direct, causal relationship between television violence and violent behavior is just too simple.

While some scholars have historically considered technological determinism in causal and predictable ways, contemporary understandings of technological determinism are more fluid; scholars are much more interested now in how technologies “may” change human behaviors, rather than discerning firm and rigid perspectives on people’s relationships to technological invention and innovation.

Tony E. Adams
 Northeastern Illinois University
 Bradley Gangnon
 Art Institutes International

See Also: Cultivation; Cyberculture; Rich Media Ad; Technological Relativism.

Further Readings

- Levinson, P. *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millenium*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- McLuhan, M. and Q. Fiore. *The Medium Is the Massage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1967.
- Ong, W. J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Routledge, 1982.
- Peters, J. D. *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Schivelbusch, W. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Technological Relativism

Technological relativism serves as an umbrella term for a wide range of ideas, theories, and approaches that are bound together by the shared theoretical belief that technology in itself does not drive social change, but rather it is ultimately shaped by social and cultural forces. Central to this belief is a general skepticism against any predetermined notion of technology’s role in the progress of society or the autonomous power of technology. Thus, it stands in sharp opposition to technological determinism. In contrast to, for instance, Marshall McLuhan’s deterministic idea that posits that certain intrinsic attributes of a dominant technology exert great influence on the main communication mode of the time as well as the social structure, the relativist would assert that the invention, evolution, and deployment of technology must be understood with regard to its broader context, one that is marked by the fabric of social, cultural, economic, political, ideological, and regulatory forces.

This antideterministic stance derives much of its theoretical appeal from the broader intellectual