

Examining the Impact of Technology in the Formation of Deviance and Social Control

Sebahattin Ziyanak, PhD

Sociology Department

Instructional Associate/Coach Academic Partnerships

Abstract

Many researchers have explored how the development of technology has affected the nature of deviance and the nature of social control in last two decades (Holt, 2009; Quinn and Forsyth, 2005; Brayant, 1984). For example, technology has been adapted by many criminals to rapidly exchange all sorts of information, and is thus a scientific and technological innovation that can foster criminality and create a new subculture of deviance. In other instances, it is reported that pagers and cellular phones are used by prostitutes and drug dealers to communicate quickly with their clients (Lucas, 2005). Car thieves too have been adapting these new devices to increase their success rates, and hate groups continuously use technology to communicate hate messages online across great distances. This paper will address how the development of technology has affected the nature of deviance and social control in the 20th and 21st century. In this regard, I will identify and discuss three technological issues, including the development of the Internet, the effect of electronic surveillance, and the development of mass media, all of which may have impacted rates of deviance or control in some way.

Keywords: Social control, Internet, deviance, surveillance, crime, mass media

1. The Development of the Internet

The fact that there are many types of Internet deviance (i.e., sexual deviance, self-harm groups, and hate groups, digital piracy) may be helpful in enhancing our understanding of the role(s) that the Internet plays in supporting or encouraging deviant behaviors. With regards to the impact of the Internet on deviant behaviors and social control, it is reported that “the Internet presents some unique opportunities for deviant behavior” (Rogers, Smoak, & Liu, 2006, p. 246). As mentioned above, the Internet has specifically provided new opportunities for deviance, through the development of virus ware, cyber terrorism, computer hacking, online harassment, and certain self-harm behaviors (Giles, 2006; Joinson, 2005). In addition, the Internet has facilitated the implementation of existing forms of crime (e.g., fraud, identity theft, and money laundering). As Joinson notes, “people have always lied, cheated, and stolen, but the Internet enables some of them to do it more easily, quickly, and cheaply.” (Joinson, 2005, p. 5).

In the following pages, I seek to provide an understanding as to how the Internet influences people’s behavior and how people use new communication technologies to form negative relationships. Internet users are rapidly increasing around the world and this technology not only impacts adults, but it affects children’s behavior negatively in relation due to its ability to foster improper sexual contact. According to a recent survey conducted by Wigley and Clarke (2000) (as cited in Livingstone, 2003) 75% of youth between the ages of 7 and 16 years have access to the Internet in the U.K. Many researchers have pointed out that while the Internet provides various benefits, it also fosters problems in the realm of social life, including hate and abusive language such as racist, ethnic, religious, and sex oriented jokes (Kuiper, 2006). Moreover, the Internet is a concern to public life due to its ability to threaten moral values.

Moreover, the Internet affects certain areas of national security systems negatively, even though regulating and censoring is not new for many governments. In this regard, many governments censored media before technology became so common (Sussman, 2000) due to the fact, governments often want to gain domestic control and today they can use information technology to regulate the Internet through censorship. According to a French monitoring organization’s estimate (as cited in Sussman, 2000) Internet access has been regulated in most countries such as Turkey, France, England, Turkmenistan, Russia and so forth. Moreover, Russia has started to project carefully regarding its national security system (Sussman, 2000).

The rapid growth of the Internet is a menace to security systems since it is impossible to control. It has frequently violated security systems. Therefore, some regulations have to be made to control the use of the Internet for purposes of maintaining a secure world.

Many researchers argue that society is threatened by pornographic images and crime related objects. Moreover, the Internet has been considered as posing a moral danger to society (Apte 1987, as cited in Kuipers, 2006). Kuipers (2006) argued that it is relatively easy today to engage in gambling, gaming, or violent games on the Internet. This raises the fear among some of the danger to the moral values of families and public life. For instance, many websites include racist, ethnic, and religious jokes. As a result, this may cause considerable stress to individuals. According to IPOLL (2003) (as cited in Kuiper, 2006), 47% of Americans consider Internet pornography atrocious and damaging to societies moral values and family life. Lathem (2001) pointed out that in order to control the harmful effects of the Internet, the US Supreme Court has attempted to block pornographic sites (as cited in Kuipers, 2006). In addition, Halavis (1999) (as cited in Kuipers, 2006), mentioned that the Internet has been responsible for ending family life, marriage, and social relationship in some cases. He also stated that some employees observe pornography or inappropriate activities during working hours (as cited in Kuipers, 2006). The Internet thus not only harms family life, but productivity in the labor market, as well.

In addition to the above facts, many researchers show that children may be in danger as a result of their exposure to certain aspects of the Internet (Livingston, 2004). Moreover, Livingstone states that families cannot always control their children at home, and many families actually let children use the Internet to obtain educational materials. According to the Kaisner Foundation (2000), (as cited in Livingstone, 2003) one in three children has visited a pornographic website. Online markets are also targeting children as prey. Livingstone points that pornographic images damage children behaviors. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Projects (2000) (as cited in Livingstone, 2003) 60 percent of young people, in the age range between 12 and 17 years of age receive various messages from many websites. Although the marketplace and economy benefits from the internet, the Internet consistently fosters crime, and delinquency and has harmful effects on young people.

2. The Effect of Surveillance on Deviance or Social Control

The world of surveillance, which is changing every day in the United Kingdom, and in the United States as well as the world, has seen drastic changes in recent times. State social control has also been incorporated into surveillance. Drawing on examples from the body scan system for national security and enhancement control at airport or cameras on toll ways /streets/traffic lights, all are components of surveillance processes. In this next section, I will demonstrate the range of direct and indirect effects on social control and deviance of surveillance systems. As outlined by Marx, in an engineered society, the objective is to reduce or limit deviance by controlling the physical and social environment (Marx, 2001).

Surveillance cameras are not only controlled and observed constantly, but also function efficiently and resourcefully (Walsh, 2001). In 2005, Governments in the UK, Australia and the US began planning for their widespread introduction for developing a national information and identification schemes in the 21st century. Surveillance includes data collection and analysis systems; and the surveillance of deviance is intended to reduce deviant behavior (Haggerty and Ericson, 2006). Why is it important to establish an outdoor surveillance system or install cameras in classrooms? Surveillance can be positively motivated by a desire to observe and protect children. Nevertheless, surveillance involves an effort to increase social control.

Moreover, the State employs surveillance as a mechanism for social control. Turkey has had an intense ongoing debate as to whether or not to install cameras in schools, and laws regarding surveillance have recently passed in the legislature. Internet surveillance allows parents to monitor their children. Camera surveillance can impair personality development in children while attempting to monitor civil rights violations by teachers. The Ministry of Education banned internet surveillance systems that allowed parents to track their children in kindergarten. The Ministry's decision on the camera system, emphasized, "the obstacle to the development of personality of children".

In addition, everyday surveillance is related to vast databases of personal information, which are generated by our engagement with many information gathering and communication systems: cell phones, credit cards, e-mail, Web surfing, global positioning systems, electronic medical records, frequent shopping cards, smart cards for accessing parking structures, buildings, or toll roads, and so on (Ball and Webster, 2003; Haggerty and Ericson, 2006; Lyon, 2003; Monahan, 2007; Staples, 2000).

Staples (2005) in his work “The Culture of Surveillance; Discipline and Social Control in the United States” looked at the ways in which people are increasingly monitored and controlled in everyday life. For Staples, the consequences of social control can be observable and understandable and can occur as a result of using even very simple surveillance cameras. New questions emerge about freedom, privacy, and the power of the state and private organizations in United States. For instance, Chicago has no less than 2,000 surveillance cameras across its neighborhoods after leaders launched a determined task that cost approximately \$5 million. Law enforcement organizations said crime rates were the lowest they had seen in 40 years due to the surveillance cameras (Bennett, 2006).

3. The Mass Media

The key issue surrounding the role of media technology is the nature of control that should be exercised over such technology. Film, radio and television broadcasting including electronic media, cinema and the press have linked many societies more readily than ever before. Communication media technology influences culture, control and as well as deviance. [I don't include electronic media here. I think that it is more suitable in development of the Internet part]

Ironically, the media play a major role in creating various distorted images of our youth. Most of these images underscore complications like crime, drug use, and teen pregnancy. Sixty two percent of census respondents responded that juvenile crime was on the rise, although violent crimes by adolescents were at their lowest point in the 25-year history of the National Crime Victimization Survey. The majority of the respondents stated that they received their information from the media. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, as far as drug use goes, over the last 12 years the statistics have fluctuated as regards infractions, which are currently decreasing.

“In June 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan blamed journalists of “serving the aims of the terror organizations and this allegation came after Turkish media had exposed terrorist attacks” (Rind, 2014, p, 1). In the realm of terrorist agendas, the primary purpose of terrorism is to expand fear and create more fear and construct it so it is continuously visible.

TV also plays a chief role in labeling certain groups. These labels are habitually grounded upon stereotypes, and can either be optimistic or (in most cases) damaging. For example negative labels of certain ethnic groups can be based upon racism. It should be noted that individuals also should cognize the latent influence of labels, such as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

On the other hand, some International partial magazines – Marie Claire- have shown women terrorists as heroes or Amazon warriors. 15 pages were explicitly, admiringly and eloquently stated about women terrorists in the PKK. Roj TV is also a PKK's media branch. They are active in some European countries and broadcast their cynical views and tarnished language claims against Turkey (Bulac, 2007). Thereby, the Media focus on and attempt to furnish every detail of their attacks and demise.

Above all, according to Potter (2007), cartoons such as the Road Runner and Bugs Bunny are very violent, in fact, cartoons are consistently rated as the most violent of all programs on television because the characters are continuously getting "stabbed, shot, hit with heavy objects, blown up, rocketed into the sky, and flattened into the ground," conversely the characters always recover and never die.

4. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, there is ongoing battle between deviance and social control the way people think, feel, and behave. This paper shows how technological developments are incorporated into this battle. Some unwanted information is available on the websites, such as kidnapping and child abuse. It is much easier to receive private personal information, as well. Systems cannot secure the Internet user from hackers' attacks while surfing on the Internet. As a result, people may lose their ability to post private information, which may endanger their financial situations. According to Livingstone (2003), society, lifestyle, leisure times, work, crimes, and deviant acts have been shaped by technology. Media have also managed to acquire dubious aims and very fragile structures. For instance, the media can create moral panic within a society by presenting distorted pictures of certain groups, which can result in fear.

In addition, although technological innovations are created to deter deviant behavior, the consequences of social control may also cause deviant behavior. This paper displays three ways in which technological innovations can result in deviant behavior, such as the development of the Internet, the effect of surveillance, and the mass media.

References

- Cline, V. B. (n.d.). Pornography's effects on adults and children. Retrieved December 11, 2013, from <http://obscenitycrimes.org/clineart.cfm>.
- Giles, D. C. (2006). Constructing identities in cyberspace: The case of eating disorders. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 45, 463–477.
- Haggerty, K. D., and Ericson, R. V. (Eds.). (2006). *The new politics of surveillance and visibility*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Lambe, L. J. (2002). Dimensions of Censorship: Reconceptualizing Public Willingness to Censor. *7 Communication. L. & POL'Y* 187–235. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Lambe, L. J. (2008). Who Wants to Censor Pornography and Hate Speech? *Mass Communication & Society*, 7(3), 279–299.
- Livingstone, S. (2003). Children's use of the internet: Reflections on the emerging research agenda. *New media & society*, Vol5(2):147–166. Sage Publications.
- Joinson, A. N. (2005). Deviance and the internet: New challenges for social science. *Social Science Computer Review*, 23(1), 5–7.
- Kuipers, G. (2006). The social construction of digital danger: Debating, defusing and inflating the moral dangers of online humor and pornography in the Netherlands and the United States. *New Media Society*, 8 (3); 379-400. Retrieved December 11, 2013, from Sage Publications.
- Marx T. G. 2001 Technology and social control: The Search for the illusive silver bullet In the International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences.
- Potter,(2007). A discussion of the media's influence on behavior. *Media Violence and Social Deviance*.
- Rind, A. (2014). Is media glorifying terrorism? *Pakistan Observer*.
- Rogers, M., Smoak, N., & Liu, J. (2006). Self-reported deviant computer behavior. *Deviant Behavior*, 27(3), 245–268.
- Staples, W. G. (2000). *Everyday surveillance: Vigilance and visibility in postmodern life*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sussman, L. R. (2000). Censor dot gov: The internet and press freedom 2000, *Journal of Government Information*, 27, 537-545. Retrieved December 10, 2010, from Elsevier Database.
- Paton W. N. (2001) 'Smart cameras will spot the guilty before they commit a crime', *The Observer*, 22 July, 2001.