

## 9.3 Same old

### READING The medium is the message

- Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.
  - What different media can you think of which give us information?
  - How do different media treat the same message or information, e.g. TV news and newspaper news?
  - What do you think the phrase 'the medium is the message' means?
- Read the article. Answer the questions.
  - According to the author, how has the medium of the Internet changed things?
  - What is the 'same old message' conveyed via the Internet?
- Find these phrases in the first paragraph. Choose the best definition (a–b).
  - the broadcast media (line 4)
    - TV and cinema
    - TV and radio
  - amplify or accelerate (line 6)
    - make more modern and efficient
    - make bigger and faster
  - previous human functions (line 9)
    - the things people did in the past
    - how people had moved around before
- Read the rest of the article again. Find evidence that supports these arguments.
  - Little of what we do has been changed by the Internet.
  - The Internet is collaborative in nature.
  - The Internet is democratic.
  - The Internet is just another vehicle for business.
- Find these words in the text and complete their definitions.
  - pronounce** (para 1)  
= \_\_\_\_\_ in a formal and authoritative way
  - on-demand** (para 2)  
= \_\_\_\_\_ you want it (e.g. TV)
  - transformative** (para 3)  
= with the ability or power to \_\_\_\_\_ things
  - stylized** (para 3)  
= represented in a particular, but not \_\_\_\_\_ way
  - vent your spleen** (para 3)  
= talk about things that make you \_\_\_\_\_
  - breaks down** (para 4)  
= has a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ collapse
  - (be) hard-pressed** (para 5)  
= finding something very \_\_\_\_\_
  - amplified** (para 5)  
= made \_\_\_\_\_

### VOCABULARY New Internet words

- Put these words and abbreviations into the right category (1–10). Then discuss the exact meaning of each word.

BRB	BTW	blogs	browse
buzzword	crowdfunding	cyberbully	hotspot
landline	meme	offline	online petition
phishing	photoshop	podcast	selfie
snail mail	spam	surf	troll

- looking at the Internet
  - traditional (non-Internet) media
  - commonly talked about idea
  - people who are rude to others online
  - unwanted or dangerous email
  - taking and editing images
  - raising money or support
  - web-based articles or programmes
  - access to the Internet
  - common abbreviations
- Work in pairs. Answer the questions.
    - What abbreviations do you commonly use in messages?
    - Do you think there should be a law against trolls or cyberbullies? Why? / Why not?
    - How do you protect yourself against phishing?
    - Have you ever helped with a crowdfunding campaign or signed an online petition?
    - Do you like taking 'selfies'? Why? / Why not?
    - What 'meme' or buzzword has caught your attention recently?

### SPEAKING Creating a sharing website

- The medium of the Internet lends itself naturally to collaboration and sharing with others. Flickr (photosharing) and Wikipedia (general knowledge) are two websites that are good examples of this. Work in small groups. Think how a user-sharing (learners only) website that helps people with their English could work. Consider these elements:
  - what services or content the website will feature and how this will be presented
  - the website name and the target audience (who do you want it to benefit)
  - whether all services are free or if some are paid for
- 21st CENTURY OUTCOMES**  
Present your idea for the website to another group. Compare and pool the best ideas.





# the medium is the message

'The medium is the message' pronounced Marshall McLuhan famously in his book *Understanding Media* in 1964, discussing how the printing press five centuries before and the broadcast media in the 20th century had changed our lives. McLuhan pointed out that what new media do is to 'amplify or accelerate existing processes'. 'The railway,' he said 'did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure.'

McLuhan could equally well have been talking about the Internet, because the Internet has changed everything and nothing. We send emails where once we sent letters, we read online news where once we read newspapers, we look things up on Wikipedia where once we went to the library, we watch on-demand TV where once we had to satisfy ourselves with what the programmers were offering us at a given time. Above all, we spend and consume – food, clothes, music, electrical goods, games; the Internet is all the shops we want it to be, rolled into one. That's a shop on a hugely different scale, but it's still a shop.

Those who believe that there is something genuinely new and transformative about the Internet point to its collaborative and democratic nature. People who had no voice in the conversation before now have one. Online petitions on various issues accrue tens of thousands of signatures within hours. The girl who tweeted her disgust

at the mannequin she saw in the window of clothes shop Topshop which was so thin it could not even be classed as a size 0 found a large and sympathetic audience when her tweet went viral. The company was forced to issue a statement saying that its mannequins were stylized, not exact representations of real women. But does that mean collaboration is a new idea? No, it has just become easier to share your opinions – and often, it seems, to vent your spleen – with anyone willing to listen.

As to democracy, it is true that stars of the Internet could just as easily be you or me as an existing celebrity. A video of a British woman, Jo Milne, hearing for the first time after cochlear implant surgery is deeply moving (she breaks down in tears of joy as the days of the week are read aloud to her by a nurse) and the fact that she was able to share this on YouTube without the financial backing of a television producer is surely a positive thing. But it does not make the screening of such a moment new.

Ultimately, even if we believe that the Internet was built on a spirit of democracy and freedom as its hardcore supporters claim, it is on the economic drivers of business that it has flourished. Browse online and you will be hard-pressed to find any page or video that does not feature some form of advertising or promotion, because that, whether you like it or not, is the message that drowns out all others: Buy this! It's not a new message, simply one that has, as McLuhan pointed out, been amplified by a new medium.