# CONTROL ON USERS: A Critical Approach on Interaction

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It has been quite a challenge to name the age we are living in. Humanity has been surrounded by the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Each and everyday we are becoming more addicted to these technologies and it is no wonder that our civilization is rising on them. As a mather of fact ICTs introduce new media, what we can possibly call a transformation of the traditional media (Öğüt, 2004). Social and individual enviroments and relations are formed upon these mediums. New variables are defined and the new effects point at new paradigms.

## Socities: Information, Network or Interaction?

Widely accepted the concept of an Information Age occurs as defining this era of humanity: as it is the idea of a society that simply lives on information in all means. It is ironic to call these days as the age of Information, since information is not a concept of a new founding nor an invention, it has been always there. But it is again technology that pushes the society to move onto another stage. The interactional relation between the society and technology certainly aims a coherent developement in human life. Thus society urges technology for its needs. Technology not only diverses new forms to answer these needs; but also reveals new paths that the society was not aware or asking of.

Sociology and media studies seem to be blurred within conceptual arguments. Today we can easily bump into other descriptive terms on society besides information, such as, network and lately interaction. Castells' impressive statement of a Network Society (1996) has not even met a decade when Wiberg came with a new suggestion of an Interaction Society (2004). It is obvious that these are hard times for academics to both define and name everyday life. But it is no wonder since life has been accelerating with a vertiginous speed and is getting even faster and faster as we speak. All these facts lead to a certain point of that we are in a state of a transition period. It is necessary to lay down as many answers as we can in order to illuminate the future and understand the past once when we look back.

Back in the late 1940's, when Wiener introduced the theory of Cybernetics, he stressed that the society could only be understood through a study of messages and the communication facilities that belonged to it. Thus he classified communication and control together. His original idea on controling machines turned out to be no different than controlling society. He explained the purpose of Cybernetics as the developement of a language and techniques that will enable one to attack a problem of control and communication in general, but also to find the proper repertory of ideas and techniques to classify their particular manifestations under certain concepts (Wiener, 1954). According to Wiener, information was a name for the content of what was exchanged with the outher world as we adjusted to it, and made our adjustment

felt upon it. In other words the flow of meaningful data which is effective on behavioural changes could be called as information. Since information carried by messages is definitive and is a measure of organization, contrary, entropy is a measure of disorganization. In order to control the results of given actions, it is inevitable to not talk about feedback which is a / a set of messages containing information related to taken messages.

Wiener's work, influencing Shannon and Weaver, lead to an outcome for the mathematical theory of communication, which is propably the most and best known theory of communication of all times. It also was a trigger of the information theory and the sign of the coming information age.

As communication studies and theories found a new platform to develope on, technology transformed into a very important fact on the practice. It was not a secret what a mass communication device, like radio, could offer. But it became a certain problem for communication studies, how to encode a message, or in other words information, the most actual and right way in order to control or manipulate the society.

## New Media and The User

Today the media is called new.  Though the concept of "new" is not new, we still can agree the idea since revolutionary transformations in media technology has happened. The founding and integration of personal computers is absolutely a milestone in media and communications history. As for a definition a new medium supposes to have these properties (Manovich, 2001):

- Numerical Representation
- Modularity
- Automation
- Variability
- Transcoding

As companion to these properties, computer based media includes the power to:

- Production
- Manipulation
- Distribution
- Exhibition
- Storage

It is at no time and very less of effort to activate these terms. The new media introduces a "new level of interaction" and also emerges the concept of "the user" (Öğüt, 2004).

The user offers to be more of just being a "receiver". New media offers freedom of selection in a wide range. Thus today the user is a more active participant in the

communication process. Though it might be wrong to say that the receiver was a passive party when it comes to the conventional mass media tools like the newspaper, radio and the TV. It is obvious that the receiver had the freedom to feed the message back via writing a letter to the newspaper or call the radio / TV show and participate the process. But at this certain point the receiver needs another communication channel to become the source itself for a certain moment of time; in other words another channel was necessary for interaction. Contrary today new media tools provide a ready channel on the same medium for interaction that makes the interaction process more effective. In this context it is very much right to say that new media provides a new level of interaction and this is the key element that needs to be focused on.
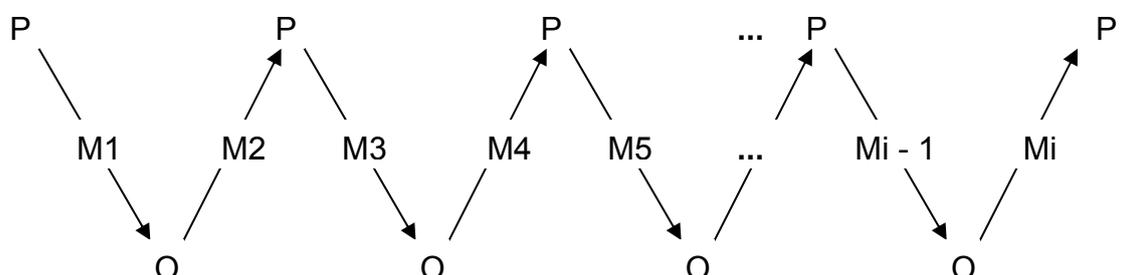
## Interaction: Definitions and Models

Interaction consists of two concepts; inter and action. The term inter has the meaning of "between, among, of" while action simply means "exertion of energy or influence". So the term itself is usually taken as "to act reciprocally or to act on each other" (Varey, 2006). It is possible to treat interaction as a sub - system of communication where at least two parties are needed. These two parties need to have an common experience field to communicate and to exchange information. The information exchange process is expected to have an outcome or in other words an effect on both parties. This way communication happens while in between interaction finds life as well.
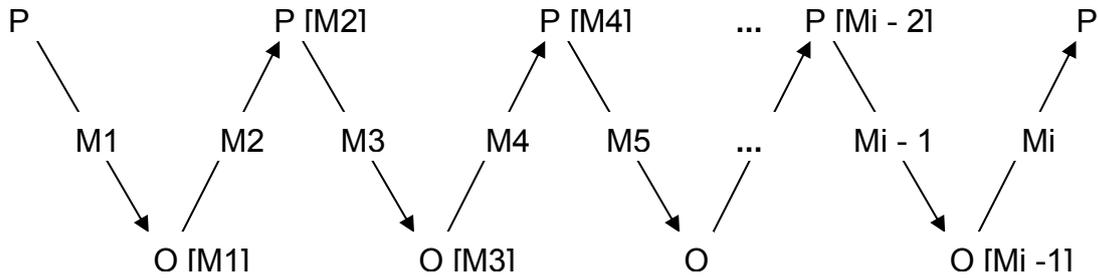
From a perspective communication embodies via two paths: Mediated or Non – Mediated. Mediated communication simply takes place on a medium while non – mediated communication does not need a third object. Of course it is controversial if communication ever happens with out any medium. There for it is essential to define a medium is. According to DeFleur and Dennis, a medium is any object or device used for communicating a message by moving patterned physical information over distance and preserving it through time (DeFleur and Dennis, 1998). There are perfect examples around us like paper, CDs, walls, stones etc. that fit in this definition. From this perspective direct communication like face – to – face communication is a non – mediated communication since there is no such medium that stores physical information through space and time. So interaction must be examined the same way both mediated and non – mediated.

There are several models suggested by academics in order to explain interaction. One of the is Rafaeli's model that covers both mediated and non – mediated interaction. Rafaeli builds his approach on a comparison logic. He defines levels of communication that he calls Two – Way and Reactive Communication.
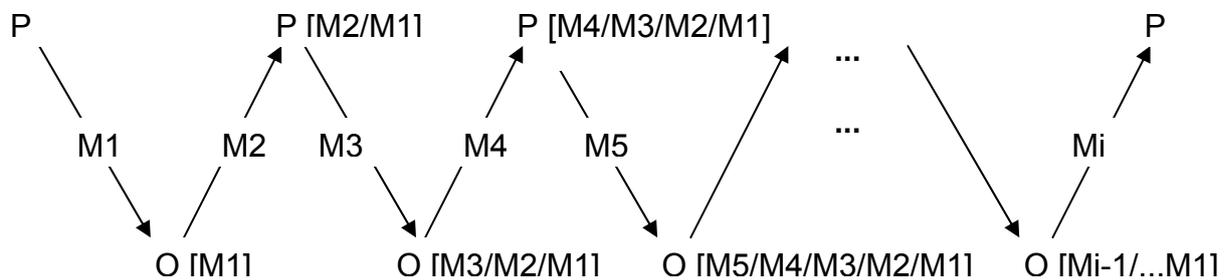
**Two Way Communication**

**Reactive Communication**

P                P [M2]              P [M4]         ...   P [Mi - 2]            P

   M1      M2      M3      M4      M5      ...      Mi - 1      Mi

        O [M1]              O [M3]              O               O [Mi -1]

In these models P and O are parties that communicate and M is the message. Two – way communication is build on message exchanges where the messages do not interfere with each other. Reactive communication is the model of an awareness of the parties, where the pre-message is considered to form the actual message.

**Interactive Communication**

P              P [M2/M1]       P [M4/M3/M2/M1]                         P

   M1      M2      M3      M4      M5        ...      ...          Mi

        O [M1]       O [M3/M2/M1]      O [M5/M4/M3/M2/M1]    O [Mi-1/...M1]

The interactive communication model focuses on the whole communication process where the parties build or have already built a common experience field. Messages are simply formed on an early gained information exchange and each information set is regarded in fact to form the actual message. This suggests that interaction is different than feedback and it is a quality of the situation or setting (Rafaeli, 1988).

Another model, fairly more up – to – date, is suggested by Wiberg. Wiberg states that the concept of interaction and interaction support could be defined in relation to the concepts of communication and collaboration (Wiberg, 2005). He builds his model on Ljunberg's (1999) and Dix & Beale's (1996) suggestions.
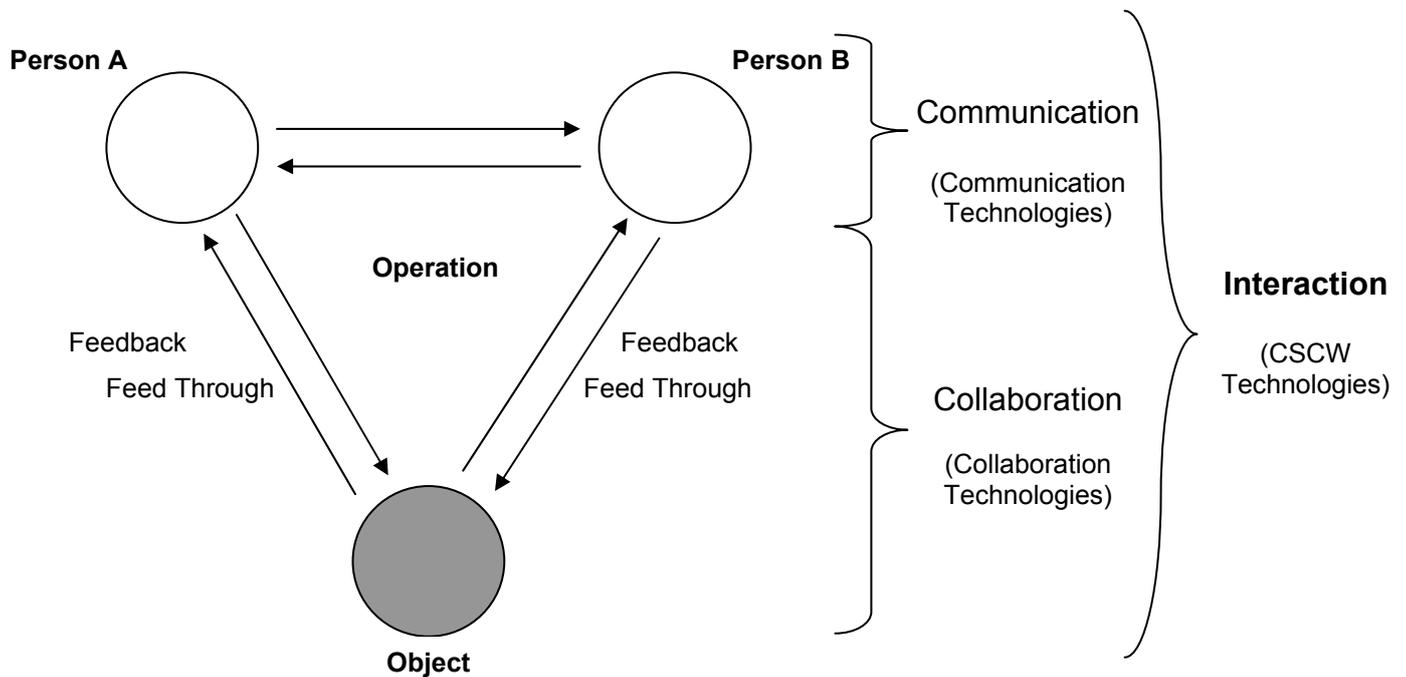
Wiberg clarifies his model on defining the terms, communication as the exchange of information between people via a tool / medium and collaboration as two or more people operating a common object or artifact. In collaboration, operations produce "feedback" to the operator, but also "feed through" to co-workers. He states that in the context of his suggested model, communication and collaboration could be concived as subsets of interaction.

There is no doubt that Wiberg's model covers mediated communication only. His approach focuses on today's new communication technologies. He stresses this point by supporting the concept of interaction with Computer Supported Collaborated Work (CSCW).

## The Source and Control

Speaking of these models and definitions it should be pretty clear that the dominant part of the issue focuses on the receiver. But since there is always a second party during the whole processes it is necessary to stress the existence of "the source".

The source is widely defined as the communication strating party. This simply means that communication starts with a message transmission and the party that starts first transmitting is the source. As this might not be wrong, it can claimed to be deficient in many aspects.

Communication can not be limited to only a moment. It has lots of variables due to complex human behaviour. Thus it would not be right to say that communication is being started by a party. Though the source can be defined as the party that serves the communication. During the interaction process it is hard to see where the source and the receiver stands since they share an common experience field and exchange their roles. But focusing on the fact of where the information flow is being controlled may help to determine the actual positions of the parties.

The Informatics approach is based on data calculation. According to this approach defining an object can be possible on actual facts or in other words on data. In few words we can tell that the existence of an object can be calculated of the sets of data that forms it. As much data is known so the object can be defined more. Simply, as many parts of the puzzle tiles you do have in your hand, it becomes easier to see the big picture and put the puzzle together. In order to control the communication process the source needs more data about the user. And as much data it can gain, the effect of the message will be more.

## Conclusion

In these means the interaction that new media and its tools introduce is simply a function of the source. New media provide more accurate data / information collection about the user while it serves an artificial freedom of selection. These data sets provides an opportunity to define the user's attributes and this may lead to a consequence of full control.

Interaction shouldn't be reviewed only as a technology advancement. It needs to be handled also as a social issue. New media gives the chance to define what was formerly known as "mass" because it provides direct communication with individuals that form the society itself. Via these media, social transformations can be controlled in a way that did not exist before. It is possible to make a person feel like a real individual by letting him modify any content or control any relation. But it is very important to see that the source is the party that draws the borders of the medium.

Today it is very easy to realize that almost everything is becoming individual. The market is based on goods that are being marketed to individuals. With a little treat of customization every good can be introduced as "person – special" and can be sold in very different varieties and ways. Though taking a look on the bigger picture will clearly show that another defined mass is being form of these individuals that they are not aware of.

Just like the expenses, the individual mind can be manipulated the same way. Common sense can be "uploaded" to an individual mind which ironically can make "the matrix" a reality.

It is at the expense of the dominant source to manipulate the user for public benefit or cost. Wiener's control theory on society becomes a reality in the age we are living in. Also privacy becomes publicity and it is becoming harder and harder to keep a unique personality in this space. As interaction is being introduced as a quality of the medium, the dominant perspective on new media technologies evolves in a

consuming habit. Every piece of interactive media tool that is being consumed, may actually bring the user to a more controlled state. Control might be something that every society must have in a way. But choosing the conditions of of it should be at the expense of its members.

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