

# **The advent of printing in the early modern Europe as an example for value change**

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It is often described that technologies are influencing cultures and societies. Technology has an impact on sciences, forms of working and the everyday life. An actual example is the internet of things. Its establishment in working processes reduces and replaces manpower in many workspaces. But also it is changing our everyday life if our Echo Dot communicates with our Hoover to clean our apartment or if it communicates with our fridge to draw up a shopping list. So technologies transform our cultural praxis. But do they also have impacts on common values of a society?

It is important to note that the notion of “value” in this context refers to common ideas about what was desirable in a contemporary perspective. (Stollberg-Rillinger 2007) They are especially represented in the perception of contemporaries and they are also manifested in a corresponding praxis. So, both dimensions, contemporary praxis and perceptions, have to be taken into account to describe the social impact of technologies on common values. Especially historical examples offer the possibility to reflect such perceptions and praxis as well as the transformations, that have actually occurred. Thus, they are suitable to investigate the question of value change. In this context it will be reflected using the example of the advent of printing in early modern Europe.

Historical research often emphasizes a media revolution at this time as a result of the advent of printing. (Giesecke 2006, Eisenstein 1983, Würzler 2009) It is characterized by new dimensions of distributing and receiving printed texts as well as by the possibility to acquire information without a direct face-to-face communication. In consequence forms of visual information acquisition became dominant forms of deriving relevant information. (Rothmann 2005, Giesecke 2006) Fundamentally connected to this revolution is the innovation of Gutenberg in the technology of printing. Not the letterpress itself or the typography were new because these technologies were known before Gutenberg. But with a combination of new and improved old mechanisms Gutenberg innovated the technology of printing in a manner that transformed the forms of communication and the mode of information acquisition. (Faulstich 1998, Burkhardt 2002) If one accepts the idea of a revolutionary transformation as a result of the advent of printing as researchers claimed, it stresses the question, if this new technology innovated by Gutenberg also influenced or changed values.

Gutenberg's innovation, embedded in early modern Europe, supported new forms of cultural passing as in times before its establishing. One important and new aspect related to the cultural

context is that printing was embedded along free-market lines. This new structure led, for instance, to a larger number of identical printed texts and to a larger number of recipients. The latter is a result of the new possibility to buy prints, that opened access to new information for new recipients of this information. Another consequence is that important information was more and more preserved by publication than by being locked up. (Rothmann 2005, Weyrauch 1990, Giesecke 2006) The quantity of prints as a result of Gutenberg's innovation in its specific embedding shaped new forms of information consumption and influenced the mode of information acquisition.

Besides the cultural context the social construction, represented by the perception and praxis of contemporaries, must be taken into account. For instance, the general acceptance of that new technology is one important aspect that supported its establishment in early modern Europe. Criticism, for instance, was not directed against the technology itself. (Giesecke 2006, Estermann 1999) That printing technologies were established in China or Korea without comparable cultural impacts, long before Gutenberg's innovation, underlines the importance of both dimensions to understand the influence of technologies. (Chappell 1999)

Impacts of the innovation in its specific embedding changed values regarding forms of handling information. Important information was saved henceforth not through the quality of the storage medium and its careful handling but through the production of a quantity of relevant information and its publicity. (Eisenstein 1983, Giesecke 2006) Because of the embedding of prints along free-market lines, they were available for money and in consequence potentially available for more people. This transformed the perception and the assessment of important information with consequences for the social praxis. Examples illustrating this point are the Protestant Reformation and, subsequently, the Peasants' Revolt. Both demonstrate social movements based on the distribution and the reception of printed texts. While the Protestant Revolution highly stylized the written word as the authority of God and not the pope or the Catholic church, the Peasants' Revolt supported this idea in distributing protestant prints that mobilized supporters of the revolt to formulate claims. (Chappell 1999, Giesecke 2006) Because of the possibility to print texts and to distribute them on free-market lines, a new dimension of recipients of identical information was available in a shorter time, what has an impact on the dynamics of social movements. (Giesecke 2006, Burkhardt 2002) That this new medium of information, the printed and sold text, influenced these events, expresses a transformation of common ideas about desirable conditions in handling information. The value of visual information was transformed in consequence of the advent of printing. (Giesecke 2006) This fact enforces the hypothesis that technology has the power to change values.

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