

Tomas OLRI CH

Minister of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland

Today we stand at a crossroads. Leaders of the countries of the world have met for the first time to discuss future visions and a plan for further developing the information society. The mass media and the information society are so closely connected that it is difficult to imagine one without the other. It is thus highly suitable to discuss the status and role of mass media in the information society.

The combination of globalisation and technological progress has completely transformed the mass media. World news is now broadcast almost as the events occur and the supply of news and entertainment is practically unlimited. The deluge of information, which we experience, is such that the public may become disoriented. At the same time, we face a lack of pluralism in international news coverage due to the concentration in the distribution of international news. This development in traditional mass communication is a cause for concern.

Internet media communication is in many respects a counterbalance to the traditional channels. Here a new mass media environment has developed which follows completely different rules. The various web and news channels flourishing on the Internet are often ahead of the traditional media with news or assessments of current affairs. There are also chat rooms, web logs and discussion fora, providing individuals with opportunities to express their views at no great cost and communicate them to an unlimited number of others throughout the world. Since the younger generation actually utilises the Internet to a much greater extent than its elders, one could say that a certain generation gap has developed here.

It is safe to say that pluralism flourishes on the Internet, since specialised news and information sites are steadily increasing. The Internet has thus become a channel for new mass communication, where different views and opinions can be expressed and democratic discussion can take place.

I regard the Internet as of major importance for free media and communication. It is a tool to ensure freedom of expression and to provide individuals and groups with the opportunity to express a variety of opinions. In my opinion the impact of the Internet on mass communication is still only beginning and will increase in the coming years. We should bear in mind that a new generation is growing up which takes advantage of the Internet in its daily life and which makes high demands for speed, variety and a diversified exchange of opinion.

For this reason, I suggest that we direct our sights to an increasing extent to the great variety of media that the new generation is embracing on the Internet.