Digital Analogs: Explaining the Internet

Carl Blumenschein

Communications Department, Texas A&M University

Communications 205 - 501: Communication for the Technical Professions

Professor Aschenbeck

March 17 2025

Digital Analogs: Explaining the Internet

Introduction for the entire concept, an introduction to the technical topic

The internet is a jungle, a maze, a mess, a masterpiece, a million other things all at once, and by far and away the most influential piece of technology created within its era. Unfortunately, while it is extremely prevalent and important in nature, the vast majority of people even that grew up navigating it have no real idea what it is or how it works. This paper exists to solve that, or at least to try, for a variety of individuals by creating clear and development-appropriate comparisons for all those who wish to learn. This will be done by two main comparisons: one comparing the internet to a library, for the less advanced learner, and elaborating on why such a comparison is appropriate; the other going into more depth on the dynamics and regulatory possibilities of the internet by comparing it to a marketplace.

Analogy for Kids- an introduction to the child's analogy

First things first is the clearest and simplest comparison one can make between the World Wide Web and anything else: a library. That such a comparison has been made many times before does nothing to make it less valid. Indeed, the information both contain, the only somewhat true nature of that information, and the extremely cheap or even free nature of their access give libraries and the internet much in common.

Point One- Lots of Information

The internet and libraries both have lots of information in them. Libraries, of course, are well known for their books. Literature, art, history, practical manuals of various kinds, a good library can hold enormous amounts of useful information on just about any topic imaginable. So,

likewise, does the internet: making black powder, surviving in the wilderness, maintaining your tools and computers and cars, the names and histories of the constellations, of historical events, of entire countries, between its myriad of websites the internet has accurate information on all of these and more. In fact, the internet contains so much information, so many books, now that according to the *Journal of Forestry* it has significantly reduced demand for paper worldwide! So then, just like a library, the internet is an extremely valuable tool for learning useful and important things, since there is so much data inside it, and can seriously help anyone who is willing to learn.

Point Two- Unreliable Information

Unfortunately, the internet and libraries both have not so useful information too. Just like libraries hold books that for one reason or another might not be accurate; badly made "self-help" or "get-rich-quick" works, books that are out of date with current scientific understanding, "historical" fiction that changes a lot of history to make for more interesting plots, even straight fiction (if one, for one reason or another, decides to take it as fact and act based off of what it says). The internet has all of this as well, but unlike a library there aren't typically librarians around to tell you which books are good to learn from and which ones aren't (not to mention why they are or are not good to listen to), so while there may be a lot more information on the internet, it's a lot harder to use wisely, since you can have a hard time telling the truth from lies or fiction.

Point Three- Free Use

The internet and libraries are both more-or-less free to use, which is the most important way in which they are similar. Using a library just requires, depending on the library, either a library card or else just being in the building to let you access most or all of its many books. The internet works more-or-less the same way: some websites require payment or logins to access (like needing a library card to use a library) while others just need you to be there by having an internet connection (like other kinds of libraries). Since the internet only needs an internet connection to access (as opposed to needing to be in a specific place somewhere in the world), and since it has such a massive amount of information available, this means that it allows almost the entire world to access almost all the knowledge in the world from anywhere, letting anyone learn from the books it contains.

Conclusion for kids analogy

In conclusion the internet is extremely similar to a library in that it has lots of useful information, lots of not-so-useful information, and is nearly free to use. Its differences, however, are what make it such an important development: it holds far more information than any library ever could; it on the other hand is much harder to tell what things on the internet are true or false, as compared to a library; and most importantly it is freely available to almost everyone around the world, rather than just those close enough to visit the building.

Analogy for Peers- an introduction to the peer's analogy

The simpler analogy having been clarified, now we must move on to the more complex, arguably more educational one: the internet as effectively a marketplace first and foremost. Like the library, this links the more nebulous network that constitutes the actual internet with a public

space, but this analogy captures both the central impetus of the network and its servers (making money) and the chaotic nature of its navigation and regulation to a much greater extent.

Point One- "Market Stalls"

The internet and public marketplaces both have what are effectively "stalls" for sale: that is to say they both require individuals to pay money in order to set up "booths"(i.e websites) where those individuals can act and trade in complete freedom. public marketplaces and websites must be effectively "set up" in very similar manners: either one buys the land, material, and capital to construct a storefront on owned land outright (for the internet this would be purchasing and paying to maintain a dedicated server with internet connection, allowing one to host one or many websites without being beholden to any external provider or terms of service); or else one can pay for a preexisting spot, say a segment of a mall or a building in a parking lot, something that leaves them beholden to the actual owner of the space (paying any of the various website making services or for a domain name owned and hosted by another, in internet parlance, which works effectively the same way). The similarities are remarkable, but the relative ease and cheapness of setup for various websites (even when attempting the "construct from scratch" option) results in there being drastically more of them than at any comparable marketplaces.

Point Two- Hard to Navigate

The internet and public marketplaces are both hard to navigate. Today search engines such as Google and Firefox make navigation at least possible for the layman, but not only was that not always the case (indeed, initially visiting any website meant knowing its IP address in full and being able to type it perfectly on the regular), even now up to 99.97% of websites exist outside of

the reach of any given search engine, according to an article by the *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, meaning that those users which rely on only one can access on average only 00.03% of the internet's total websites. This makes the internet, like any particularly large and busy public market, nearly impossible for individuals to navigate without either assistance or experience. Sure, limited sections may be easily traversed (those catalogued by various search engines, or in the analogy areas of the market where stalls are wider apart and the crowd thins thereby allowing perusers to easily see both where they are and where they are going), but if one wants to see everything it has to offer one must either get someone in the know to guide them (someone familiar with whatever topic the individual wants to do a deep search in) or else develop that familiarity themselves over the course of many long years. What makes this harder than any comparable market, mind, is the internet's global scope: while a particularly large public market could see hundreds or thousands of sellers setting up literal mazes of booths and storefronts, the internet contains all of the websites in the entirety of the world within itself, either without or almost without exception,

Point Three- Impossible to Regulate

The internet and public marketplaces are both effectively impossible to truly regulate. This one is a direct result of the above two similarities and their differences interlocking in perfect storm: The only reasonable method for the government to control the hardware portion of website creation is to limit sale and use of that technology(something meaningfully impossible on account of both the amount of technology and the number of people that need it on a daily basis, a computer for instance being technically usable as a server) on account of the relative ease of setup; the difficulty of navigation away from the larger search engines and especially for any

website seeking to be hard to access makes attempting to regulate all or even most websites in the virtual sphere itself moot; the sheer volume of people setting up and running websites and their ilk thanks to that same ease of setup makes regulating or policing anything even harder; and the fact that the internet allows one to navigate between almost all websites set up by anyone on the entire planet itself (i.e. in areas where any given government may not even have jurisdiction, in addition to meaning there are even more volumes to go through if one wants to try and police or regulate them) all make it effectively impossible to do any sort of regulation on any but the largest portions of the internet (i.e. areas where large corporations openly exist that can be bargained with or threatened). Surprisingly enough, this is not something new to the analogy when one thinks about it: public markets contain within them, after all, both black markets and what are effectively black markets by default; governments both in the United States and worldwide can't really regulate any commerce under a certain level of notoriety. Take for instance a farmer's market: any given farmer in their stalls could, in theory, simply take the physical money people pay for their goods and not report it on their taxes, and on account of their miniscule size relative to larger industries and corporations the government at large would never know or be able to stop him. The only real difference in this area between the internet and a public marketplace is that the internet's unique position of being a truly global network makes it near impossible to restrict any given website or application (even the large ones) without having direct access to the servers it runs on, enabling things like United States citizens being fully able of downloading and accessing Tik Tok via various methods despite a theoretical legal ban.

Conclusion for peers analogy

In conclusion, while very much like a library in many ways, the central operating structures, limits, and even the inherently evasive nature of the internet all bring it to resemble nothing more so than a public marketplace, where websites are set up or bought with abandon, where individuals can find themselves hopelessly lost within its bulk, and where the government has a near impossible time regulating anything that happens at all. Both of these comparisons are important to remember as a voter: it is crucial, before you vote on propositions or politicians with designs on regulating or protecting this space, that you have an understanding of how it fundamentally works. But for your own use? Best to know, to understand, to remember: what you can see easily is only a tiny fraction of what's out there, you can find nearly anything you need if you look hard enough (and almost always for free), but above all else be careful that what you find is actually what you are looking for, because nobody else is going to vet its truth for you. That, in the end, is how the internet truly works.

Bibliography in mla or apa style

Bergman, Michael. "White Paper: The Deep Web: Surfacing Hidden Value." Journal of Electronic Publishing, vol. 7 no. 1, Aug. 2001, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0007.104

Greg S. Latta, Andrew J. Plantinga, Matthew R. Sloggy, The Effects of Internet Use on Global Demand for Paper Products, *Journal of Forestry*, Volume 114, Issue 4, 1 July 2016, Pages 433–440