

# Adult Education in The Multimedia Society in Japan : Living and Learning

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The year of 1983 can be said to be the first year of the new media age in Japan. Today, various communication media, which has effectively contributed to socio-economic development, has deeply penetrated into our daily lives. It has played an important role in economic and social changes.

On the other hand, there is so much information available that people are confused about which information they should choose. Computers provide information but they can not select information for you.

It is up to the individual to find ways of obtaining and managing appropriate information and knowledge for personal and society's benefits.

## 1. Multimedia and Contemporary Society in Japan.

The terms such as multimedia, internet, personal computer communication have become familiar to us but understanding the meanings of these words is a different matter. There are many who are illiterate in computer technology.

There is a wide gap in technical knowledge between competent computer users and non-users. This is partially due to people's ages.

### (1) *The Effect of Multimedia on Society*

Mail order sales have become popular these days. Considerable prices reductions result from saving on middle margins, which is considerable.

Some newspaper companies have started offering electronic mail services using personal computer networks. Newspapers via multimedia will soon be realised. However, training people operates of this high technology will become a problem.

Technological publication, which started with the invention of the printing machine by Gutenberg five hundred years ago, has also been changing rapidly. Soon every possible information will be able to obtained on the internet.

Virtual reality technology will be developed as an important source of entertainment, enabling us to enjoy our alternative lives which are different from our real lives.

However, the long term influence or effect this will have on human beings is yet to be seen.

### **(2) *The Effect of Multimedia on Politics***

Central and local governments and their organizations will have to face radical changes due to the introduction of new media technology.

“Electronic government systems” using new media technology will replace the conventional ones.

How will the systems of the central and local governments have to change? Two of the most important changes will be an improvement in their efficiency and an achievement of better, friendlier services to the public.

In order to achieve a friendly relationship with the public, these organizations must give the public the right to access to various kinds of information and documents and convince the public that they act fairly.

It means the central and local governments should input various kinds of administrative information and documents into their data bases so that the public can access to these data bases using their networks or the internets. Messages to the public can be also sent by electronic networks.

The government information we can obtain on the electronic network is very limited at the moment. It is possible to access the Prime Minister’s office on the internet. ([hht/www.kantei.go.jp](http://www.kantei.go.jp).)

In the near future, Members of Parliament should be accessed on internets.

### **(3) *The Effect of Multimedia on Business Management***

Multimedia will become an important new tool in business management. There are two ways of using multimedia. Firstly, multimedia will bring a new style of business management. Secondly, it will bring an innovated method of business management.

Through the use of multimedia, some businesses can be managed by very few people and even university students will be able to run businesses by using the multimedia technology while studying.

Multimedia is also used for business communication and communicating among business people for their mutual understanding.

If all company employees use personal computers with electronic mail, they can

communicate directly with senior members of the firm. This will result in democratising the company system, preventing bureaucratic management and resulting in sharing the information equally.

**(4) *The Effect of Multimedia on Office Work***

The clerical work system will become more co-operative with the use of multimedia technology. No matter where they work, people will be able to communicate easily and work together. With telecommuting it will be no longer necessary to be in the same work place and commuting time will be saved resulting in improved efficiency. The quality of family life will also improve.

**(5) *The Effect of Multimedia on Life Style***

How can we select appropriate or useful information from the massive amount of information provided through information technology and communication services?

Today, everyone has to have the ability to use this information technology. Multimedia technology is useful to volunteer organizations for networking. It will also be useful to people who participate in some social organizations or activities as they can exchange their opinions and information much more rapidly and easily.

The communicating function of institutions such as schools, libraries and hospitals is enforced and improved by using multimedia technology. There is a necessity for people in communities to have opportunities to learn to use multimedia technology such as the internet.

**(6) *The Effect of Multimedia on Education***

There are two key words in terms of learning using multimedia technology which are “networking” and “co-operative learning”.

Educational institutions are being networked and we can access various kinds of educational information and resources within schools as well as from other schools.

As a result, the availability of educational services has greatly increased. Learners can obtain information and resources on their research topics from anywhere in the world using computer data bases or learn from specialists or exchange ideas with experts regardless of where they live. Learners can communicate with other learners via international network and create new theories based on the information obtained.

By using the multimedia technology, learning methodology will change and co-operative learning will become more important.

Learners are to be divided into some groups and each group uses different multimedia technology for their study. The outcomes of each group are then analysed together so that a wider understanding of the topic will be possible.

With the use of virtual reality technology, it will be possible to see third dimensional angles for subjects. This will result in clearer understanding and better analysis of the subject matter.

As I mentioned previously, learning using the multimedia technology will lead to co-operative learning and teaching. This learning method will require to an ability to express opinions clearly and listen to others' opinions carefully. Learners will also be required to express their opinions independently.

There are many people who are desire to extend their knowledge but are unable to do so because they live in remote areas or do not finding time, etc. Learning using the multimedia technology will be of great benefit to these people.

Children generally regard multimedia technology as a part of computer games. Combining the functions of education and entertainment has become a trend. Nowadays, even infants use computers.

However, we should not forget the fact that the development of multimedia technology might create negative effects such as real experiences being overwhelmed by unreal experiences, over dependence on information, malfunctioning human characters caused by excess information and so on. The creation of harmful effects on human beings will be inevitable.

Consequently, we should tackle the negative effects of multimedia technology and emphasize the positive effects which will develop the spiritual and cultural side of human beings.

## ***2. The Present Situation of Learning Using Multimedia in Adult Education***

Personal computers sold very well in Japan since Windows 95 was released for sale in November 1994. According to the white paper of the Ministry of the Post and Telecommunications published in June 1996, there were 9,470,000 computers operated in January 1995 and the number of people who use them will approach one hundred million soon.

The largest number of internet users can be found in the U.S.A. with more than 6,500,000 computers, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada. Japan ranks sixth with 269,000 computers. (60% of those of Germany and the United

Kingdom.)

There are many Japanese computer users who are frustrated because they do not know how to operate them. The information desk of NEC, whose market share in computer sales in Japan is approx 50%, receives about 3000 telephone enquiries every day regarding operating or how to solve mechanical troubles, etc.

Computer communication in the Japanese language is not yet possible so English or Romanised letters are used to send internet mail overseas. This is one of the problems for those who are not good at English.

Schools which had installed computers in 1994 ;

Primary schools	66.1%
Junior High Schools	98.4%
High Schools	99.9%
Special Education School	92.5%

The rate of Adult Education institutions which install computers is low.

Multimedia technology courses for adults are offered only through the extension courses of junior and senior high schools. However, multimedia technology courses run by private institutions such as technical colleges or computer schools are very popular.

Some computer manufacturers run schools and run classes. For instance, the NEC PC College runs courses from 9 : 15 am to 9 : 15 pm with six lessons everyday including Saturdays and Sundays. These classes are always over subscribed.

Student ages range from 3 to 91 and coupons have to be bought for lessons. Each unit costs 1600 to 4300 yen depending on the class content.

There are three different courses, which are the introductory course, the expert course (in practical and multimedia technology) and the childrens' course.

### ***3. The National Educational Policy on Multimedia Technology***

According to an Ad-hoc Council of Education of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports report, the definition of the phrase "an ability to utilise information" is "an individual's basic ability to select and utilise information".

There are four elements in this ability :

- 1) The ability to evaluate, select, arrange and manage information as well as to create new information and communicate with it.
- 2) The ability to understand a characteristic of communication, and the effect

which it might have on human beings and an information-oriented society.

- 3) Recognition of the importance of information and responsibility for information.
- 4) The ability to understand characteristics of fundamental elements of the information society and information technology (especially computers) and to obtain basic operation skills.

The Ministry has also proposed the following full-scale preparation for the infrastructure of the information society.

**A. *Establishing a multimedia environment***

- (1) Practical use of media, such as printed materials, pictures, telecommunication and computers
- (2) Developing software and machinery to be able to use letters, pictures, sounds, etc.

**B. *Establishing software libraries***

Software libraries which collect and display educational softwares so that teachers can search and use resources for their teaching.

**C. Employing multimedia technology specialists in educational institutions.**

**D. Establishing computer networking systems for educational information in adult education institutions.**

**E. *Utilising library information and data base.***

Information should be stored and the public should have access to it.

- offering interesting information
- offering historical information
- offering proper information which people want to obtain
- offering ombsperson service

**4. *Problems and Future Directions***

The speed of the development of the information society is faster and more extensive than expected. In the future, it is likely that all social systems including the working environment and daily lives will have to change.

We must consider the content of the information we offer, which might affect other people. Pornography is not only information with causes problems to our society. More serious problems related to it will be the infringement of privacy and human rights.

Useful or goodwill information can instantly spread throughout the world, but so can information which might damage people. Is it possible to solve these problems?

The Internet has not been controlled or managed by a centralized administration system but it has been spread like the self-multiplication of amoeba.

It is impossible for us to control the world internet. The most important task will be for us to find out ways to solve these problems and to establish rules which we must obey for the future.