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Image and Use of the Internet as Presented through Advertising (*) (**)

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The goal of this article is to retrace five years in the evolution of the information society based on twenty advertisements for *Skynet* Internet services - marketed by Belgium's incumbent operator, *Belgacom* - which ran between 1996 and 2001 in the monthly trade magazine, *Inside Internet*.

Four lines of thought emerge from analysis of the advertisements, and will be developed in this article: the image of the technical object; the dual shift observed: first, of the target market: from corporate to consumer and, second, of the advertisements' central theme: from infrastructure to application; the battle against time and space and, lastly, the methods used by advertisers to convey that the Internet provides at once access to universal knowledge and universal access to knowledge.

Image of the technical object

The first conclusion that we can draw from analysing the material is the absence of all things technical in the advertising images. Only two adverts

out of twenty [11 & 15][1] refer explicitly to the computer component (status bar, computer, ...). A third advertisement has a fairly clear technical connotation [1], but all the other images presented totally eschew the technical aspect. This could appear astonishing given the context of an advertising campaign for an Internet access provider. We can nevertheless find several explanations for this phenomenon.

First, while the technical aspect is indeed very discreet in the images, it is, on the other hand, very present in the text portion of the advertisements (and particularly in those adverts focused on access to an infrastructure). The blurbs and the slogans offer a number of technical specifications on the nature of the services offered by Skynet: bandwidth and type of connection [1], calling areas equipped with a local access point [adverts 1, 2 & 3], corporate service packages [4, 6, 7, 8 & 9], hosting space available for personal sites [10], etc. In general, the vocabulary used includes a considerable number of technical terms, particularly in the "Belgacom Internet Business Solutions" campaign. Even if it is the picture that initially captures readers' attention, the technical side is far from being absent from the adverts, since it is evoked abundantly in the blurbs and slogans. In short, it's not shown, but it is spoken of.

Next, while the technical object itself is little represented, it is nevertheless felt through a number of allusions to its presence, performance and potential. We have already referred to the case of one advertisement that has a relatively clear technical connotation: cogs, TV set, x-rays, typewriter, stop watch [1]. We also find other, somewhat less direct, "technical allegories", however, such as a key chain in the shape of an "@" sign [6]. Other advertisements use metaphors commonly found in the Internet and information technologies world. How not perceive an allusion to the famous "information superhighways" so dear to Al Gore, in the image of convertibles speeding down a broad motorway [2 & 10]? Similarly, a reference to Marshal McLuhan's "global village" is equally clear in the image of quiet houses clustered around a church and open onto the world [3].

In a great many cases, however, the images are more or less veiled, the references to the technical aspect more or less conscious, the allusions to computing or to the telecom networks' services and performance more or less clear. The image of tables, chairs and stools stacked up to reach a light

[1] The numbers in square brackets refer to the number of the advertisement being referred to in the analysis. The advertisements analysed here can be obtained from the author upon request, by sending an e-mail to: lhe@info.fundp.ac.be

bulb is clearly a reference to Belgacom's competitors' technical solutions: true, they display real creativity, and even a certain ingenuity. They appear friendly, and seem to have achieved their goal. It's obvious, however, that upon first use of this makeshift solution, the entire system will collapse. More worrisome still: there's a real danger in using amateurish solutions. The message is clear: to avoid any dangers, prevent mishaps, you should always call upon real Internet professionals [4]. A second advert from this campaign takes the same approach. This time a mouse hole represents the competition's Internet access infrastructure. Again, there is a certain friendliness about the image, reinforced with bright colours and a cartoon feel. Nonetheless, the presentation is not entirely innocent since this television reference is well-ensconced in the cartoon imagery of the 50s and 60s. There is a certain "old time" feel to the illustration. Added to this, cartoon = fun... i.e. they lack the required seriousness. For a service as important as Internet access do we really want to rely on people who, although friendly, are clearly not serious? Lastly, a mouse hole is above all a bottleneck, one with inherent access issues, in other words, all of the features we want to avoid when seeking access to the Net [5].

The technical allegories, on the other hand, are surrounded by much more positive connotations when it comes to evoking the service provided by Belgacom. Through the power of computing, *Skynet* promises to deliver the impossible to your living room "in a single click." In this exercise in style, an aeroplane and a stock room floor symbolise not only the services offered by telecommunications networks, but also the different elements that comprise computer networks: websites, wired infrastructures and the computers themselves. They are therefore well present in the advertisements: they are at the centre of the home, but we don't even notice them anymore. They are relegated to the background, and the image emphasises what is essential: the service provided and the user [16 & 17]. What should we make of the sprinter winning the race way ahead of his rivals, if not that he perfectly embodies the qualities of an ideal communications network: powerful, fast, robust and dedicated [20]?

Another category of advertisement awards the technical object a different place: its presence is invisible, but nevertheless obvious given the context. Here, it is almost impossible not to think that a computer is hidden inside most of the homes in the welcoming global village to which we have already referred [3]. In the same vein, it's solely by choice that the computer does not appear physically in the last series of adverts, even if it is the centre of conversation. Here, the designers clearly chose to focus on the services rendered to users by the computer object and on the variety of people who

use the Internet. The texts written in the phylacteries now play an important role in steering the meaning of a relatively neutral image:

"The Internet for my business, okay. But only with a single partner, then" [7];

"My steadiest clients are on the other side of the world" [9];

"What on earth is Jeanine doing? I sent her an e-mail, after all." [12]

"Say, do you think I could have that file before Monday? You'll have it tonight by e-mail" [13];

"Hey, have you ever visited www.marinemammals.be?" [14]

Note that all of these legends have the role of "relay text" as identified by Roland Barthes, whereby the "linguistic message" fulfils two roles with respect to the "iconic message:" anchoring, which contributes to "purely and simply identifying the elements of the scene, and the scene itself," and the relay, which is rather rare in still images (except in comic strips) but very present in cinema (BARTHES, 1964, pp. 30-33). The effect produced by this second process is putting speech and image on an equal footing as complements whereas, when it acts as an anchor, text "has a repressive value [in relation to the potential free-association of image signifiers]" (BARTHES, 1964, p. 32). Image and text are therefore almost instantaneously decrypted and "the unity of the message takes place at a higher level: that of the story, of the anecdote" (BARTHES, 1964, p. 33). There is therefore a real desire to resituate the scene and, from there, the use of the technical device in an almost banal context, as a mundane part of our daily lives.

Although computers are not part of the imagery in these advertisements, we always guess that they are nearby: in young entrepreneurs' offices (with typical Web user profiles), in the offices of company presidents and lawyers; in the homes of elderly women or right next to two children. The images naturally contain certain "immediate" information (the people's appearance, the place where they are located, etc.), but they also provide us with information on what is outside the frame, and that we cannot see in the advert. And, just as "a tree visible above ground allows us to guess at the existence of roots beneath the ground" (Bateson), in the image of two children sitting at their desk, we can guess at the existence of a computer on the work surface [14]. We notice that:

"... the totality perceived exists only by our understanding of the visible portion, and therefore that this portion summarizes, synthesizes or totalizes the whole. Between this portion and the whole, the

redundancy is perfect, there is perfect agreement between the perception and what is actually seen." (MEUNIER & PERAYA, 1993, p. 135).

In short, the computer is not there, but it's not far off. We can't see it, but we sense its presence.

The question is now no longer: "why does the computer object not appear in advertising images?" since we have just seen that its presence is subtle, but no less real. The question that should now be asked is: "why don't advertisers show the computing tool explicitly, but rather almost mundane scenes from everyday life?" We can suppose that the explanation is tied to the desire to emphasize the use of the technical object rather than on the technical object itself. First, because not showing the computer can help dispel some people's reluctance to tackle the difficulties involved in using new information and communication technologies. The emphasis then is put on the beneficial effects of the technology, by obscuring the problems linked to learning to use is. Next, the extension of this attitude consists of giving the appearance of a technical device so fully integrated into daily life that we don't even notice it anymore. Technical devices such as the telephone, the TV set and the radio are now integral parts of our daily life. Their presence in homes is now considered natural. People who do not have them are in fact perceived as "marginal," "unusual" or "abnormal". These few lines taken from Jacques Ellul's book entitled "Le bluff technologique" (The technological bluff) marvellously sum up this tendency to render technology banal in order not to frighten human beings:

"Since presenting Man with the image of a mutant, of a Cyborg, invariably makes him react. It's the banality of the day to day that reassures him. And the technical genius (and not the technicians'!) lies precisely in producing the most reassuring and the most innocent banality." (ELLUL, 1988, p. 35).

Users' fear of technology has often been identified as one of the principal causes of resistance to computer tools both at home and at work. It is therefore essential to demystify computing by erasing all technical language, which comes close to the esoteric for a great many average users. It would therefore seem that to encourage use of a technology, we must speak of everything except the technology itself...

It is therefore the incorporation of the technical object into the banality of daily life, and not the technical object itself that primes in the advertising message. But we must also recall that Belgacom and Skynet sell Internet access and not computers. So, while it is relatively easy to represent a

computer, it is a much trickier endeavour to provide a concrete and pictorial rendering of a network. This also explains why advertisers rarely show the technology and call upon a number of metaphors and allegories throughout their campaigns.

From corporate to consumer, and from infrastructure to application

During the five years covered by our analysis, we have witnessed a dual shift in the advertisements' content: on the one side, a slow shift in the target market from the corporate to the consumer and, on the other, the emergence of the theme of applications, overtaking the theme of infrastructures during the second half of the campaign. Let us look first at the issue of target clientele before looking at the question of a "technology in search of applications."

Initially, the advertisements were aimed primarily at businesses, and offered them an already wide range of services. On the other hand, the few adverts aimed at consumers at that time were still limited to an Internet access service. It therefore seems rather clear that there exists a generation gap between corporate and consumer users. Added to this, the advertisements depicting tableaux show only men, apparently between the ages of 30 and 40, in other words the typical profile of an Internet user at the time [7, 8 & 9]. These male executives, in their thirties, therefore constitute, to an extent, innovators or early adopters of the new technology (ROGERS, 1962). The dialogues themselves even indicate that they are company heads; the terms "my business", "my sales" and "my clients", leaving little room for doubt in the matter. It is impossible not to see the link with those young entrepreneurs who got rich quickly thanks to their dotcom start-ups, launched at the height the new technologies' emergence. Another interesting element in these advertisements is the contrast between the scenes that take place during leisure time (people watching a tennis match, on a sailboat out at sea) and the conversations about their activities: the lines between work and play are being erased, the two activities tending to be superimposed in the information society. The workplace is blending more and more with the places of leisure, and the traditional schedule of eight hours at work followed by a few hours of family life are being erased with the emergence of "multiplexed" activities, during which professional and personal discussions are intermingled (MITCHELL, 1995).

Next, the technology is gradually being disseminated within other populations of users - those that Everett Rogers calls the "early majority," then the "late majority" - largely boosted by a drop in rates ("This summer our prices are melting, melting, melting!" [10]). We can suppose that the technology's S diffusion curve, as presented in the works of Everett Rogers (ROGERS, 1962) and Elihu Katz, has reached its exponential growth phase, following the "influence of early adopters on their entourage, then of the second adopters and so on" (KATZ, 1961). During this contamination phenomenon, and parallel to the ongoing drop in rates (from "free Internet access for all" [12] to "fully free Internet" [14]), the advertisements show that "everyone's becoming Internet" [14]: senior citizens, women, children, etc. [12, 13, 14, 15, 16 & 17]. The level of saturation of the S-curve has now been reached - or at least the private companies are seeking to convince consumers that saturation has been reached - but "the new generation Internet has arrived!" [19]. Note too that at the graphic level, a veritable break marks the passage from one cycle to the next with two advertisements announcing, in a rather abrupt fashion, that the basic service is now absolutely free [18] and the arrival of a new technology: ADSL [19].

A new cycle begins, then, with this new generation technology that is expected to seduce early adopters, these "opinion leaders who have a general propensity to innovate, to adopt a new technique, whatever it may be" (FLICHY, 1991, p. 2). The accent is now once again on companies and businessmen during this advertising campaign:

> "Business is often a race against time. You've always got be first to take first prize." [20].

By applying this same schema of dissemination, it is even possible to imagine what Belgacom's ADSL adverts will look like in the coming months: after a first wave of announcements aimed specifically at early adopters (companies, businessmen, ...), we could well see a campaign focused on the gradual drop in prices for the technology (the onset of exponential decrease), followed by another series of advertisements that illustrate ADSL's dissemination amongst a wide variety of users, to announce the drop in rates right up to, who knows, free ADSL, or even... totally free ADSL. This would signify that the technology's diffusion curve had reached its saturation level, and so up to the operators to offer a new alternative to early adopters to begin yet another new diffusion cycle.

Parallel to this shift from the corporate to the consumer world, we can also observe over time that the advertisements evoke applications more and

more, and infrastructures less and less. Let us take a look at this shift that we can interpret as a manifestation of the gradual disappearance of the "technology in search of applications syndrome" from which the Internet appeared to be suffering.

Initially, the advertisements concentrated on the infrastructure and the question of access, and did not speak - or very little and in a particularly vague and imprecise fashion - of the ways that we can use the Internet [1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 11]. The first advert in this group cites in bulk a series of possible applications for the Web (e-mail, erotica, distant learning, newsgroups, FTP or IRC services, etc.) drowned amidst relatively clear references to the technology (cogs, stop watch, typewriter, TV set, x-rays, etc.) and lost in among technical information on the service that Skynet offers its customers (round the clock connection with no daily limit, large bandwidth, leading edge technologies adapted to V 34 up to 28000 bps connections, etc.). At this stage, applications appear to still be an only secondary consideration that nobody is really concerned with. Confidence in the technology is such that it seems obvious that applications will develop naturally. Thus, the message steered by this first wave of advertisements can be summed up by the arrival of a new technology with such remarkable potential that no-one can do without it. From now on, everyone will inevitably be surfing Internet, even if it is still absolutely impossible to say what its use will be. The text stays in the realm of the vague since, "Skynet offers you everything you've ever dreamed of:" dreams are no longer unattainable, your wildest dreams, the Internet brings them all to you on a silver platter. But, by speaking of dreams, we run the risk of overlooking the Internet's reality and its concrete applications [1].

This idea of "technologies in search of applications" is abundantly commented on in the literature on the relationship between technology and society. Some believe that it is above all the technical challenge that drives engineers to pursue technological innovation, and that it's then up to their companies' marketing departments to find a utility and to create demand among consumers (FLICHY, 1991). Here, Pierre Lévy wonders:

> "what use will there be for these fabulously powerful technologies born of the sterile laboratories of electronics companies? [...] The means are first invented, after which an end for them is sought [...] The subsequent use of these technologies is no longer their veritable (?) end, but merely a sales pitch." (LÉVY, 1982, p. 63).

In the same vein, Jacques Ellul adds that:

> "once an advanced technical product has been created, what becomes essential is to force consumers to use it, even if they see no interest in it. Technical progress commands it." (ELLUL, 1988, p. 247).

For his part, Arnold Pacey feels that this desire for virtuousness that serves as engineers' pretext for designing their fantasies, such as the Eiffel Tower, the Concorde jet or ever more powerful and faster cars overlooks the prime function of technology: that of a tool (PACEY, 1983).

It is very tempting to establish a parallel between this process adopted by private companies that are seeking to make use of their products and services seem like a natural act, an obvious gesture, and the works of Roland Barthes illustrating the way in which France's "petite bourgeoisie" in the 1950s makes use of mass culture, notably thanks to advertising, to legitimize its consumer society values, and to impose them on other social strata. In Belgium's information society of the 90s, who is still aware of using a technical object when they pick up the phone, get into a car, listen to the radio or switch on the TV set? These objects are now an integral part of our daily lives; their presence in our homes now considered "natural." It is, on the contrary, those people who do not own or use them who are considered "marginal," "reactionary," or "unusual, devoid of common sense."

In the case of the Internet, the "quest for applications" seems nevertheless to come to an end after this first phase of advertisements focused on the infrastructure, or touching vaguely on the question of applications. The advertisements thus centre next on certain very specific uses for modern telecommunications networks: e-mail [12 & 13], searching for information on the web [14 & 15], entertainment [16], financial information [17], in other words the theoretically most popular (or most common) uses of the Internet. Other uses, however, which were spoken of during the Internet's early days (FTP or IRC services, for instance) have completely disappeared from the adverts. The technology appears to have found its uses... at least in the area of advertising. It would nonetheless be interesting to compare these applications that have been "popularized" by advertising with data derived from a recent poll conducted with web users: do senior citizens really use e-mail to communicate with friends and family [12]? Do young people really consider and use the Internet as an information and research tool [14]? In short, do these advertised images correspond more or less precisely with reality, or are they just images in the minds of their creators, inspired by their idea of users and how they use the Net? We must nevertheless point to the fact that the issue of representation of users is particularly complex when it comes to ICT given, on the one hand, the virtual

nature of the user community which has no real means to express their needs and, on the other, the technologies themselves which are geared more to individualisation than to the creation of a collective identity (CHAMBAT, 1994). This issue was long obscured by the notion of technological determinism, according to which technology "[structures] the uses that are made of it" (VEDEL, 1994, p. 13). On the flipside of this viewpoint, another school of thought is that it is the social reality that influences the path of the technical object and its subsequent development.

It is probably false to claim unequivocally that dissemination of a technical application suffices to impose its use among consumers, just as it would be inexact to think that users drive the engineers to create new technical devices that respond to their true needs.

> "There thus no longer exists technical determinism any more than there exists social determinism; we must analyse the relationship between technology and society otherwise" (FLICHY, 1991, p. 9).

This third approach is perhaps that of the socio-politics of applications advanced by Thierry Vedel and André Vitalis in the hope of combining technological determinism and social determinism by taking into account "complex interactions between tool and context, offer and use, technical and social" (VEDEL, 1994, P. 32).

The battle against time and space

The third theme that acts as a backdrop for the twenty Belgacom and Skynet adverts being examined here is the battle against time and space, another theme that has been widely commented upon in the literature for some years now (van BASTELAER, HENIN & LOBET-MARIS, 2000, pp. 38-40): Internet erases, or at the very least reduces, the barriers of time and space (MORLEY & ROBINS, 1995; GRAHAM & MARVIN, 1996) and allows people from the four corners of the earth to communicate. This phenomenon of "time-space compression" seems typical of the information society. The ability to communicate instantaneously with a person located on the other side of the world is a revolution instigated by the Internet since, from now on, your computer can take you to any point on the globe [1 & 3]; your "steadiest clients are on the other side of the world" [9] and all your transactions take place "in the blink of an eye" or "in seconds" [16 & 17].

Let us look first at the images that depict the battle against space. Initially, the adverts evoked the great utopias that traditionally accompany the dissemination of telecommunications networks, with the globe a [1], "symbol of American modernism" and the herald of globalisation (MATTELART, 1999, PP. 269-270) along with the associated image of McLuhan's global village and of a society "where there are no more borders between the world and you" [3]. Note that this advertisement perfectly illustrates the concept of "glocalisation" which designates the dual and apparently contradictory process whereby ICT, by contributing to the eradication of time barriers, promotes both globalisation of economic, social and cultural exchange, and the decentralisation of services in remote regions or small communities (van BASTELAER, HENIN & LOBET-MARIS, 2000, pp. 40-42). The presence of an advert depicting the global village at the beginning of the technological deployment phase, at a time when the goal is to seduce and attract potential users, is quite logical. The aim is to lure readers by pointing to telecommunications networks' international dimension, while at the same time reassuring them with allusions to local culture and the Internet's communal aspect.

Another fundamental utopia of the Internet is that of "information superhighways" which pave the way to new places and spaces [2 & 10]. The references to wide open spaces is present again in the advertisement that depicts the high seas and the loyalty of customers "on the other side of the world" [9]. Lastly, let us underline an allusion to the ubiquity that makes it possible to be in your living room and on a trading floor at the same time, and to thus have "access to all the news of financial markets here and elsewhere" [17].

Other images tackle the myth of the battle against time. We find the image of a stopwatch [1], an hourglass and a status bar evoking unbearable delays "for those who don't want to wait on the Net" [11]. Furthermore, the battle against time is often noted through references to speed: holiday reservations come to you "very fast" or "in the blink of an eye" [16], news reaches you "in seconds" [17] and netizens are engaged in a veritable race against time, surfing "up to 30 times faster than the others" thanks "hyper-fast" Internet [19 & 20].

That we find this theme of "space-time compression" in the adverts boasting the Internet is by no means surprising. Saving time and compressing distance are two of the main founding utopias of information and communication technologies, two of the great "driving myths" that are touted by each new technique, from writing to television, by way of printing

and motorcars, to justify its existence and to forge itself a place in society (FLICHY, 1991, PP. 8-9). These two themes are particularly striking for the imagination since time and space constitute two obstacles that mankind has always sought to overcome: it is impossible to stop the march of time, and ubiquity does not exist. More fundamentally, Pierre Lévy has shown that computing and telecommunications networks respond to an economic and social imperative of western capitalism. All through history, man has explored new territories. With the end of geographical explorations in the 19th century, and the astonishing development of means of transportation,

> "The earth got small, it has already changed dimension [...] space is tending toward saturation. Toward the end of the 1960s, we realized that energy, raw material and food resources were limited [...]. We are reaching the outer reaches of saturation. Despite which capitalism continues its expansion [...]; as space no longer offers an exit, a new dimension has been opened up to continue the exponential race: time. [...] After the era of spatial-energy explosion comes the era of informational implosion in time." (LÉVY, 1982, pp. 50-52).

The battle against time responds as well to another of Western society's classic preoccupations: "time is money." It is therefore unacceptable to "waste your time."

Lastly, let us note that the aeroplane and trading floor that come "into your home" make it possible to express not only the idea of a technology that goes well beyond humans' information processing and communication capabilities, but also the reassuring idea of a technology that we can master since rooted in a familiar spatial and social setting... Hence the opening up of a time where man is no longer in control appears controllable since located in users' sphere of social reference.

Access to universal knowledge and universal access to knowledge

Lastly, it seems equally pertinent to take a look at another omnipresent theme in the advertisements being analysed (and particularly in the text portions): that of "totality," in other words the tendency to insinuate that the technology responds to *all* needs, to *all* desires and to *all* the expectations of *all* men and *all* women. Eighteen of the twenty advertisements being examined contain an allusion (sometimes indirect, but often very direct) to this "totality." We can divide them into two main groups: on the one side "totality" as exhaustiveness and, on the other, "totality" as community. Let's start with the first group.

A great many of the adverts advance the idea that the technology constitutes something of a panacea, the miracle response to all questions, the universal solution to the slightest problem. So, "Skynet offers you everything you've ever dreamed of" [1]: "Click, anything's possible" [16 & 17]. In the same vein, Belgacom, "a partner capable of answering all of your questions, and capable of responding to all of your company's demands" [7 & 8], that allows you to "take advantage of all the Internet has to offer" [4]. The insistence even veers toward the realm of pleonasm when we are guaranteed no more nor less than "complete and global solutions that bring together all of the professions and expertise of the Internet" [8]. This can not but dissipate even the most deep-seated reticence and encourage people to "take their business to the web, with the greatest odds of success" [6] and "in a fully secure environment" [9] thanks to the collaboration of professionals who master and coordinate "all of the Internet's professions" [6, 7 & 8] and offer "all the ease of their technological leading edge" [5].

The multiplication of expressions and slogans that contain this idea of exhaustiveness is probably not fortuitous. Notably, it contributes to developing in the public's mind the idea that the technology's potential is immense, inexhaustible and near unimaginable, since everything we've ever dreamed of (and more) is possible. It makes it possible to deftly avoid the delicate question of applications and the quest for applications that we have already spoken of since, although they evoke all the advantages or all of the Internet's professions in a general way, we rarely find specifics on these advantages or professions. It is enough to say that everything is possible, while never saying concretely what *is* possible. Once again, we have the impression of finding ourselves in the presence of a technology with enormous potential, and which generates huge expectations... but for which we find great difficulty in pinpointing this or that concrete application. Some phrases are geared more to reassuring a public which has little or only average knowledge of the technical details, and naturally intimidated by the idea of telecommunications networks, by emphasizing the expertise of the field's professionals: everything has been thought of, everything is under control, nothing can go wrong, no problem can arise. Norbert Wiener's original cybernetic dream of being able to control everything, and of leaving nothing to chance - staving off disorder that would lead to entropy and social chaos - is not far off.

Let's take a look now at the second kind of "totality:" the community. The proposed technology wants to be (or at least, says it is) accessible to all, "both young and old" [15], "French and Flemish Belgians from all regions" [3]. Now, "everyone's becoming Internet" [12 & 14] "all over Belgium" [3] as

there is no longer any doubt that "the whole world is enjoying the Internet!" [9]. To declare the existence of this "universal community of Internet users" is not innocuous since it is likely to provoke a feeling of being left out for those who are not (yet) part of it. Only one solution to put an end to this *de facto* exclusion, and join the community: you need only "become Internet yourself." To refuse to take that step would be to risk being perceived as "reactionary," "anti-technology" and, more damning still, refusing access to Knowledge, this real time connection to the rest of the world. Technology leading an irresistible march toward "greater welfare" (Barthes's "it's obvious") is well-known. It consists of denigrating opposing viewpoints to this widespread ideology by denouncing their lack of "common sense." The technology train is on its way, you need only climb aboard, at the risk of becoming its slave. These multiple allusions to an inexorably growing community of Internet users is part of what Jacques Ellul calls the "forced culture of technology" (ELLUL, 1988).

Exhaustiveness and community, the two sides of "totality" that we have just analysed, in reality constitute the two essential ingredients of the knowledge-based society: on the one hand, access to "universal knowledge" (in other works, access to "all knowledge") and, on the other, "universal access" to knowledge (i.e. access "for all" to knowledge). Knowledge and community. These are no doubt the two fundamental features of the information society. But it is true that "each new dissemination of a technology proffers the same argument" (SFEZ, 1999, P. 20) and is accompanied by its own brand of utopia: the advent of the global village and the community that was created when television arrived on the scene, culture at the tip of your fingers thanks to VCRs, the Minitel, information superhighways and a "new Athenian age of Democracy" (from Al Gore's 1994 speech on the National Information Infrastructure - NII), brought about by the Internet's dissemination (SFEZ, 1999).

Conclusion

Having come to the end of our look at five years of Belgacom and Skynet advertisements, what major conclusions can we draw from our analysis?

First, the different ad campaigns retrace the complete deployment cycle of the first generation of Internet technologies, according to the classic S-curve diffusion schema: a technology's adoption by a group of opinion leaders, increasingly widespread and increasingly swift dissemination

amongst a large public parallel to a drop in the price of the service, and transition to a new technology once it is estimated that the saturation point has been reached. Here, it is extremely interesting to note the extent to which the break between the two generations of technology is marked at the visual level in the two adverts with very blatant graphics: one announcing the (old) totally free Internet and the other, the advent of new ADSL technology. Another lesson to be drawn from this analysis is the advertisements' apparent desire to integrate the technical device into daily life, to make its presence seem mundane, to render its use "natural" as much for men as women, for young and less young and for work and play alike. The technology wants so much to go unnoticed that it is invisible (at least in part) in a sizeable number of the adverts, leaving the rest up to the imagination and to some of the central myths behind new information and communication technologies: the battle against time and space, the global village, information superhighways, etc. Although, in truth, what could be more logical than finding these idealised images in the means of expression that is advertising, which addresses itself to the world of dreams and the imagination?

We could no doubt have developed other paths of reflection in our analysis of Belgacom and Skynet's advertisements and taken a look, for instance, at the images that deal with security and the dangers of the Internet. The difference in the tone employed by advertisements depending on whether they are aimed at corporate users (where the emphasis is on the idea of partnership and collaboration between the access provider and the client company) or consumers (where users are generally awarded a more passive role) could also be the subject of more in-depth analysis. Other paths as well remain to be explored, but for the purposes of this article, we chose to limit ourselves to the four themes examined here.

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