This is Martha Payne. Martha is a nine-year old Scot who lives in the Council of Argyll and Bute. A couple months ago, Payne started a food blog called Never Seconds. And she would take her camera with her every day to school to document her school lunches.

And as sometimes happens, this blog acquired first dozens of readers. And then hundreds of readers. And then thousands of readers, as people tuned into watch her rate her school lunches— including on my favorite category, pieces of hair found in food. The example I’m showing you was a zero day, so that’s good. And then two weeks ago yesterday, she posted this. A post that read, "goodbye."

And she said, I’m very sorry to tell you this, but my head teacher pulled me out of class and told me I’m not allowed to take pictures in the lunchroom anymore. I really enjoyed doing this. Thank you for reading. Goodbye.

You can guess what happened next. The outrage was so swift, so voluminous, so unanimous that the council of Argyll and Bute reversed themselves the same day. We would never censor a nine-year-old! Except, of course, this morning. And this brings up the question, what made them think they could get away with something like that? And the answer is all of human history prior to now.

So what happens when a medium suddenly puts a lot of new ideas into circulation? Now this isn't just a contemporaneous question. This is something we've faced several times over the last few centuries. When the telegraph came along, it was clear that it was going to globalize the news industry. What would this lead to? Well, obviously, it would lead to world peace.

The television, a medium that allowed us not just to hear but to see, literally see what was going on elsewhere in the world. What would this lead to? World peace.


Even the printing press-- even the printing press was assumed to be a tool that was going to enforce Catholic intellectual hegemony across Europe. Instead what we got was Martin Luther's 95 theses, the Protestant Reformation, and the 30 Years War.

So what all of these predictions of world peace got right is the when a lot of new ideas suddenly come into circulation, it changes society. What they got exactly wrong with what happens next. The more ideas there are in circulation, the more ideas there are for any individual to disagree with. More media always means more arguing. That’s what happens when the media space expands.

Citation