Catching up to the future

The author connects Ray Kurzweil's predictions of a technological merger of computers and humans to changes in journalism and media. The result is a science fiction-like world of robots, cranial implants, telekinesis and more.

Research assignments at three levels:

Flashlight: Ask students to watch inventor Ray Kurzweil's "The accelerating power of technology" or Kevin Kelly's "The next 5,000 days of the web" TED talks. In a paper or blog , students would answer these questions: Have some of their predictions already been realized? Will machines make us immortal? What would be the pros and cons of a news environment in the world Kurzweil and Kelly foresee? Use additional sources as needed.

Spotlight: MIT Media Lab leader Joichi Ito focuses not on immortality but on what humans should do when he looks at how technology best helps us innovate. In a paper or blog , ask students to take Ito's stance. Why is he right to say technology is not all about efficiency? What do you think of his notion that the Internet is a "belief system?" Does your school nurture the same skills and beliefs as MIT does with its students? Is your entrepreneurial drive appreciated?

Searchlight: Ask students to explore these links:

- Guardian CEO outlines digital future of news and media industry
- Forbes: Tech companies 'control the future of news'
- The Economist Ideas Arena: The Future of News
- Poynter: AP will use robots to write some business stories

In a paper, ask students to imagine they are a journalist in the year 2020. Taking into account the readings above as well as the current chapter of this book, answer these questions: What will your daily routine be like? What are some concrete things you can do to prepare yourself for the future?

What challenges will you face?

Extra credit: How will news be paid for in the future? Look at sites like Kickstarter, WeFunder and AngelList. Are the media projects funded through these platforms futuristic? Develop a crowd-funding pitch for a form of media that doesn't yet exist.