



UC Berkeley School of Information

# The Internet: Social Effects

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**History of Information 103**  
**Geoff Nunberg**

**May 7, 2009**



## The Last Puzzler

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Who described the prevalence of English on the Internet as a "major risk for humanity"?



## The Last Puzzler

Who described the prevalence of English on the Internet as a "major risk for humanity"?

Jacques Chirac





## Itinerary – 5/7

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### Social consequences:

Linguistic diversity

The rise of virtual communities

Socioeconomic disparities

Political unity & fragmentation



# The Internet: Social Consequences

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Does the internet build communities or fragment them?



# The Internet: Social Consequences

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Does the internet build communities or fragment them?

Yes.



# Social Effects of the Internet

## Cairncross's determined trendspotting

1. Death of distance
2. Fate of Location
3. Improved Connections
4. Increased Mobility
5. More Customized Networks
6. Deluge of Information
7. Increased Value of Brand
8. More Minnows, more Giants
9. More Competition
10. Increased Value of Niches
11. Communities of Practices
12. Loose-Knit Corporation Culture
13. Openness
14. Manufacturers as Service Providers
15. Inversion of Home and Office
16. Proliferation of Ideas
17. Decline of National Authority
18. Loss of Privacy
19. Global Premium for Skills
20. Rebirth of Cities
21. Rise of English
22. Communities of Culture
23. A New Trust
24. People as Scarce Resource
25. Global Peace



# One World Language?

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# The Internationalization of the Web

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Initial prevalence of English on the Web

1997 -- Nunberg & Schuetze survey of 2.3 million pages from Web crawl: 85 percent of content is in English, including about 35 percent of content in non-English speaking domains.

Eng. Most common in N. Europe, less-developed nations

2000: Jack Xu Excite@Home; survey of around 600 million pages: 72% are in English

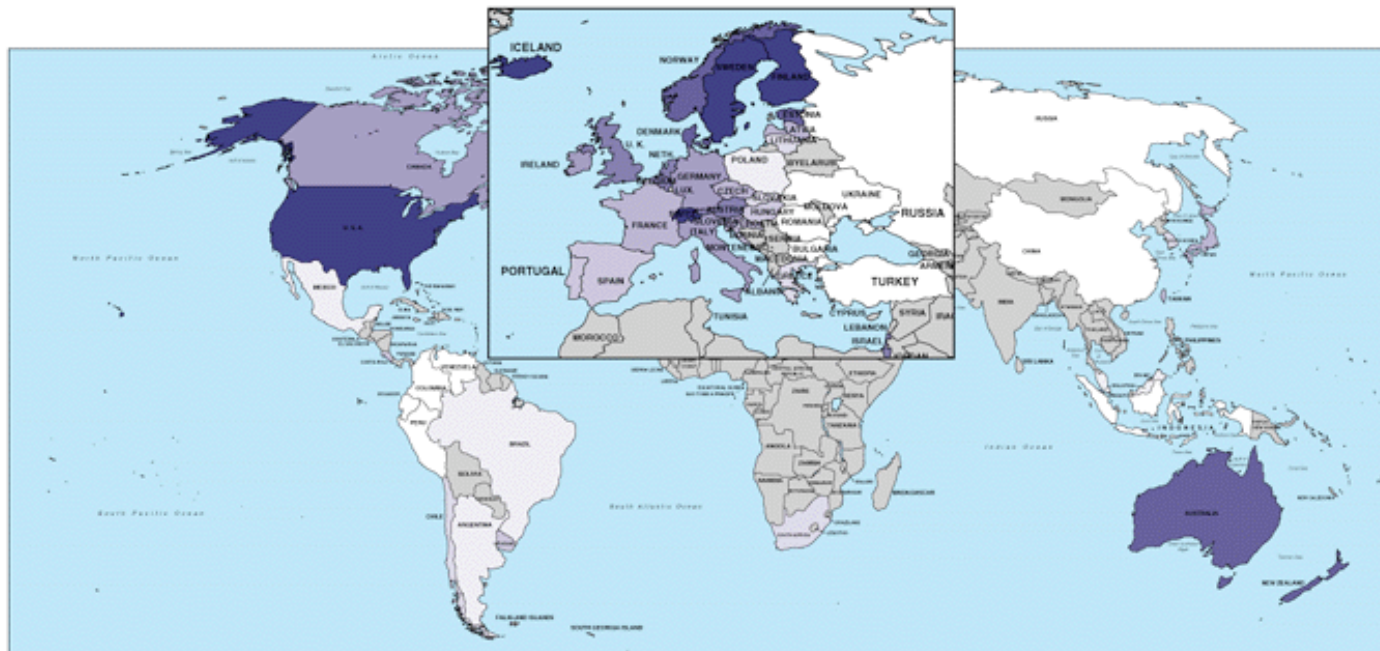


# The Internationalization of the Web

Relative size of Eng-speaking population in developed world

Cf. Web penetration, 1997

Web Penetration





## Fears of English Hegemony...

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“The Web is the ultimate act of intellectual colonialism.” Director of Russian ISP, 1999

“Nearly 70 per cent of the world's Web sites are in English, at times crowding out voices and views.” Kofi Annan, 12-Jan-04



## And Anglophone Triumphalism...

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The Internet is "a great force for the Anglification of the planet."

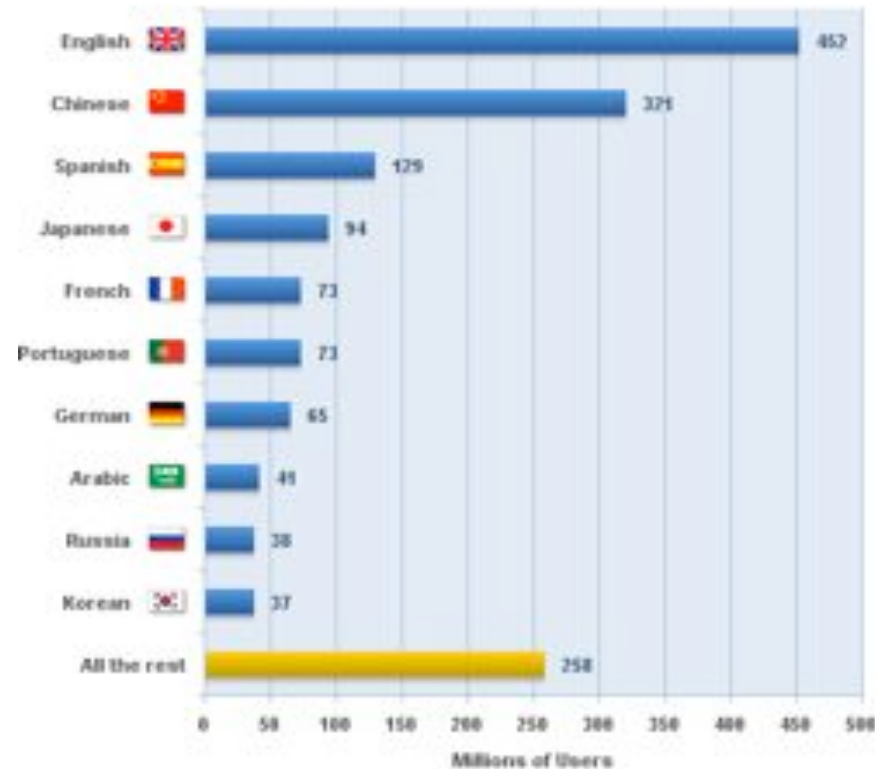
"[Thanks to the Internet,] English will be the native language of a majority of the world by some time in the next century." Editor, *The Futurist*

"There is no retreat from English as the world language; no retreat from an English-speaking world." Sridath Ramphal, chairman of Commission on Global Governance, 1996



# Growth of Other Languages on the Web

Top 10 Languages in the Internet  
millions of users



Source: Internet World Stats - [www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm)  
Estimated Internet users is 1,581,571,589 for 2008  
Copyright © 2009, Mirwatts Marketing Group

# Space for Smaller Languages

Музеј 25. мај  
Богинџева 6

Glavna nagrada  
VW Golf VI !

## ПОЛИТИКА ONLINE

30-четвртак 07. мај 2009.

ПОЧЕТНО О НАМА ИМПРЕСУМ ОБЈАВЉАЊЕ АРХИВА

ВЕСТИ БАН КИ-МУН ИМЕНОВАО НОВОГ ШЕФА БЕЗБЕДНОСТИ

Улетак се очекује  
решење ово  
штрајка

Пут у ЕУ нема везе  
са Косметом

Од недеље рад  
на Коридору 10

СВЕТ  
ПОЛИТИКА  
ДРУШТВО  
ТЕМА ДАНА

ПОГЛЕДИ  
Владимир Тодоровић  
ЕКОНОМИЈА  
ХРОНИКА  
СПОРТ  
КУЛТУРА

ШТА ДА СЕ РАДИ ?

ЕКОНОМИЈА  
Јужни ток кроз Србију – 400 километара

Web encourages the spread of English....  
And maintenance and spread of smaller  
national, regional, and ethnic languages

פֿאַרווערטס

1897 פֿאַרווערטס

May 1st, 2009

HELP פֿאַרשטעלען אָרטיקל וועגן אונדז פֿאַרשטעלען אָרטיקל

Radio  
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פֿאַרווערטס  
ייִדיש־וועלט  
בובליציסטיק  
נייעס  
קהילה לעבן  
רעליגיע  
קולטור  
געשיכטע  
פֿאַטאָגראַפֿיען  
מסמכה  
פֿאַרשיינדע  
בריוו פֿון לייענער  
אַנאָנסן  
אַבאָנעמענט  
אַרכיוו

May 1st, 2009  
פֿון רעדאַקציע

### ישראל: וואָס וועט זיין די ברירה?

מיר האָבן די פֿאַרגאַנגענע וואָך זיך געפֿרייט, צוזאַמען מיט די ישראל־  
בירגער, מיטן 61סטן געבויר־טאָג פֿון דער ייִדישער מדינה. ווי אַ ייד  
זאל נישט וווינען, פֿאַרבינדט אים מיט דעם שפּאַלן שטיקל ערד אַפֿשר  
נישט אזוי די דאַטע אַליין, ווי דער גורל פֿון געהערן צו איין פֿאַלק מיט  
איין אַמונה און איין געשיכטע. די רעגירונג פֿון ישראל, נישט וויכטיק  
פֿון איר אידעאָלאָגישער פֿאַרזיצע, איז קיין מאָל נישט געבליבן  
גלויבניגליטיק צו דעם גורל פֿון די יידן אין די תּפֿוחות — צי זאל עס זיין  
אין עטאַפֿיע, צי אין געוועמענעם ראַטן־פֿאַרבאַנד, אָדער אין אַנדערע  
לענדער.

לייענט ווייטער  
לאַזט איבער אַ קאָמענטאַר

May 1st, 2009  
קונסט

### די ייִדיש־וועלט פֿון דער פֿאַטאָגראַפֿיקע דזשאָון ראָט פֿון איציק גאַטעסמאַן (ניו־יאָרק)

ווער עס קומט אויף ייִדישע אונטערנימענען אין ניו־  
יאָרק, זעט די פֿאַטאָגראַפֿיקע דזשאָון ראָט ביי דער  
אַרבעט. אָדער מיט איר ווידעאָ־פֿאַראַט, אָדער מיט איר  
פֿאַטאָ־פֿאַראַט, אָדער מיט בייִדע, כאַפּט זי אַפֿ די

פֿאַרשיינדע  
זשעסטיק  
ייִדישע מאָטיק  
אין וועלט אַרצין

Dijous  
7 de maig del 2009

## EL PUNT.CAT

DIARI INDEPENDENT, CATALÀ, COMERCIAL I DEMOCRÀTIC

BARCELONA AGENDA SERVEIS CANALS REGISTRE BLOGS PRESENCIA

Portada Territori Societat Punt divers Política Economia Cultura Comunicació Punt de vista Esports

Eleccions europees TOTA LA INFORMACIÓ SOBRE LES ELECCIONS 7 de juny 2009

BARCELONA PAISOS CATALANS EUROPA

La Moreneta és blanca

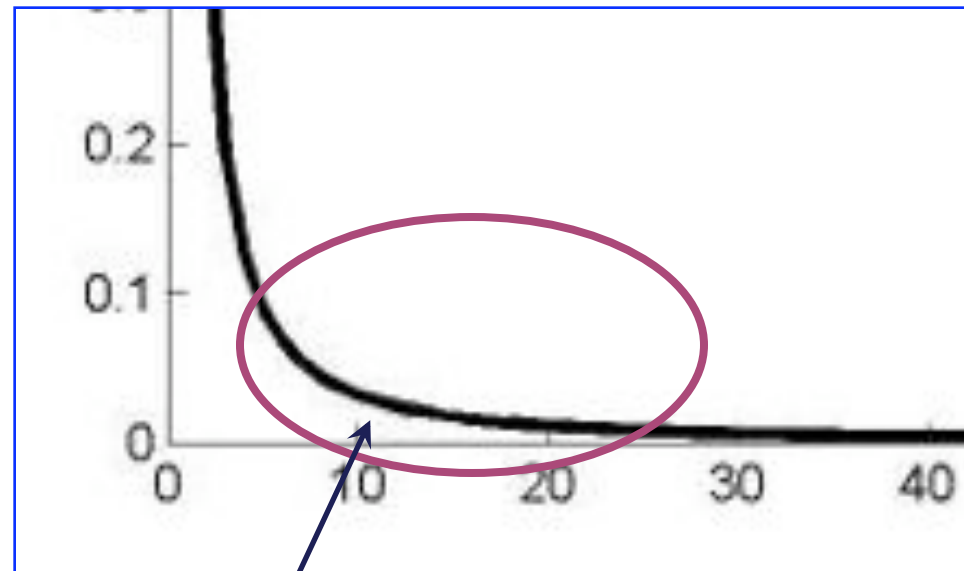
L'estudi sobre el Roine desaconsella el transvasament perquè és car i problemàtic

«Agurs, l'ibz»



## Where the action is:

The middle range of the powerlaw curve



South of Wilshire



# The Biggest Gains in the Middle Range

English  
Steven Spielberg  
Coldplay  
DNC  
Trade publishers.



Hungarian  
Erich Rohmer  
Carlos Varela  
Ron Paul  
Book resellers  
Small presses...





# Social Life in a Virtual World

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16.1 Introduction of Topics

17. Decline of National Authority

18. Loss of Religion

22. Communities of Culture



# Social Life in a Virtual World



Predictions that Internet/Web will decentralize authority & permit ground-up social & political organization and the development of "virtual communities"



Of the "virtual corporation," "smart mobs," [moveon.org](http://moveon.org), etc., which are said to facilitate direct democracy



# The Rise of "Virtual Communities," I



1978-79: Early MUDS (Multi-User Dungeons) enable players of text-adventure games to interact & team up.

1979 > Early BBS's (Bulletin Board services) allow users to connect via modem to a common server & post messages.

1980: USENET is conceived as "poor man's ARPANET" to allow users to exchange email & software.

1990: First MOOs ["MUD Object Oriented"] created at Xerox Palo Alto Research center. Permits participants to create objects, rooms, etc.





# The Rise of “Virtual Communities,” II



1985: Stewart Brand & Larry Brilliant found the BBS The Well (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), which becomes an influential “virtual community” providing email, forums, etc.

WELL participants go on to found Craigslist, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Salon.com, etc.

1986: Matchmaker dating service begun as text-based BBS, adding to groups like soc.singles, etc. By 2003, US Web-based online dating services draw 40m annual visitors.

1995 Craig Newmark founds Craigslist in San Francisco for posting of local events; by 2000, expanded to 9 cities.



# The Beginnings of Social Networking Sites

friendster beta

What is Friendster?

[Sign Up](#) | [Take a Tour](#) | [Testimonials](#) | [More Info](#)

Friendster is an online social networking community that connects people through networks of friends for dating or making new friends.

**How does it work?**

Friendster allows you to create a personal and private networking community where you can network through your friends, their friends, and so on.

**How do I use Friendster?**

Just create a quick profile and add your friends to your personal and private networking community. Then you can see the friends of your friends, and browse and search through all of the people connected to you through networks of friends. You can view photos and profiles, see how you are connected to people, send messages, ask friends for introductions, or suggest matches between people.

**Is Friendster only for dating?**

Friendster can be used for all types of social networking, such as making friends, meeting other couples, or people with kids etc.

1997: Slashdot created to provide user-generated “News for nerds.” Becomes wildly popular antecedent of blogs.

1997 Sixdegrees.com founded, social networking site that achieved 1m members and anticipated Friendster, MySpace, LinkedIn & Facebook etc.

MEETUP

Topic Search

[Browse all topics](#)

**Top Topics**

**Politics & Activism**

1. [Sean in 2004](#) (+ 188,900 members)
2. [Clark in 2004](#) (+ 66,600)
3. [Kerry in 2004](#) (+ 52,000) [see more](#)

**Books**

1. [Bookcrossing](#) (+ 38,800)
2. [Harris Potter](#) (+3,900)
3. [Soylent Green](#) (+ 2,300) [see more](#)

**Film/TV**

1. [Bill O'Reilly](#) (+6,400)
2. [Buffy](#) (+4,400)
3. [Anime](#) (+4,200) [see more](#)

**Meetup organizes local interest groups.**

**What?** Meetup is a free service that organizes local gatherings about anything, anywhere.

**Who?** 1,044,000 people have already signed up for Meetups about 3,982 topics.

**Where?** Meetups happen at local cafes (and other places) in 612 cities across 51 countries.

**Why?** Because there are people like you in your town.

**How?** [Find your topic](#), sign up, show up! That's it.

**Upcoming Meetups**

- [Newly Single's](#), London, England in 74 minutes
- [Activists to Impeach Bush](#), New York City in 5 hours
- [Activists to Impeach Bush](#), Boston, MA in 5 hours
- [Activists to Impeach Bush](#), Broward County, FL in 5

**FIND YOUR CITY**

Country:

Zip Code:

[Browse all cities](#)



# The Rise of “Virtual Communities,” III



1998 Moveon.org founded to militate for moving past Clinton impeachment hearings. In 2003, becomes important channel for opposition to Iraq war, major source of funding for antiwar candidates.

2002 Meetup.com founded to facilitate offline meeting and networking of interest groups. During buildup to campaign, it becomes an important source of grassroots political organization for Howard Dean campaign, later for Kerry & Edwards.



# The Triumph of Social Networks



2003: myspace founded, rapidly becomes largest soc. networking site. Complaints about stalking, exploitation, spam, etc. lead some schools to block site.

2003: Second Life launched by Linden Labs.

2004: Facebook launched by Harvard undergrad Mark Zuckerberg, extended to other colleges, high schools, & general public. By 2009, claims 200m members worldwide.

2008: Helped by Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, Obama campaign's use of new media ("MyBo") enables it to raise \$200m by end of primary season and recruit numerous volunteers.



# The complications of "community"



“Community” usually implies rich interaction around common interests

Online interaction creates or strengthens groups organized around significant common interests; e.g., sexual orientation, political activism, diseases...

But "community" is also used for almost any kind of group formed online... so long as it's judged positive







# Varieties of Online Community

Relation of online media to social groups

Supports      Amplifies /extends      Transforms      Creates





# Varieties of Online Community

Grade-school  
alumni group  
Book History  
list  
MeetUp  
Leukemia dl

## Relation of online media to social groups

Supports      Amplifies /extends      Transforms      Creates





# Varieties of Online Community

But what about Facebook?

Relation of online media to social groups





# Public, Private, and in between ("in public")

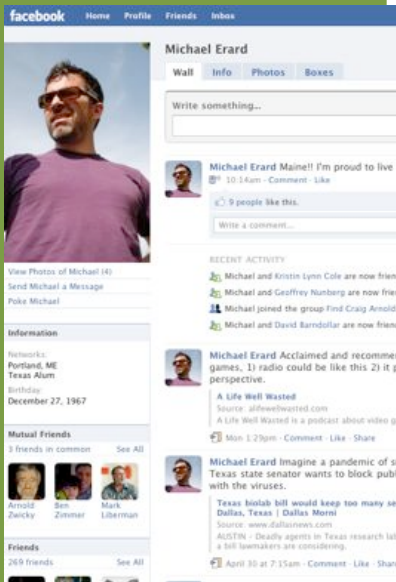
But what about Facebook?



We didn't take away any privacy options. [Your privacy options remain the same.] The privacy rules haven't changed. **None of your information is visible to anyone who couldn't see it before the changes.** If you turned off your wall to non-friends, no one who is not your friend will be able to see a post on your wall. Your friends can still see it; it hasn't changed. Secret groups and secret events remain secret from other people. Pokes and messages remain as private interactions. **Nothing you do is being broadcast; rather, it is being shared with people who care about what you do—your friends.**



# Public, Private, and in between ("in public")



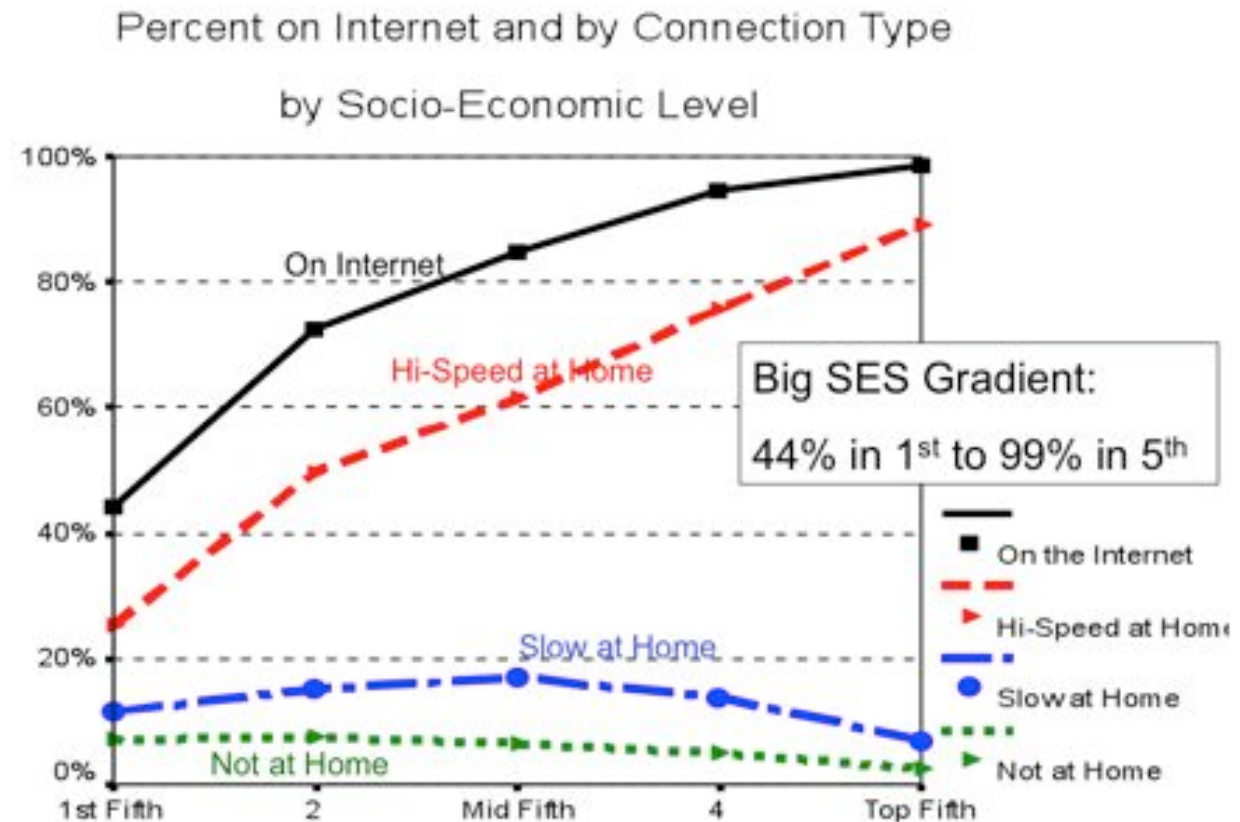
700,000 - 750,000 members; 8% of Facebook population

4000 discussion board threads

Students  
Against  
Facebook  
News  
Feed



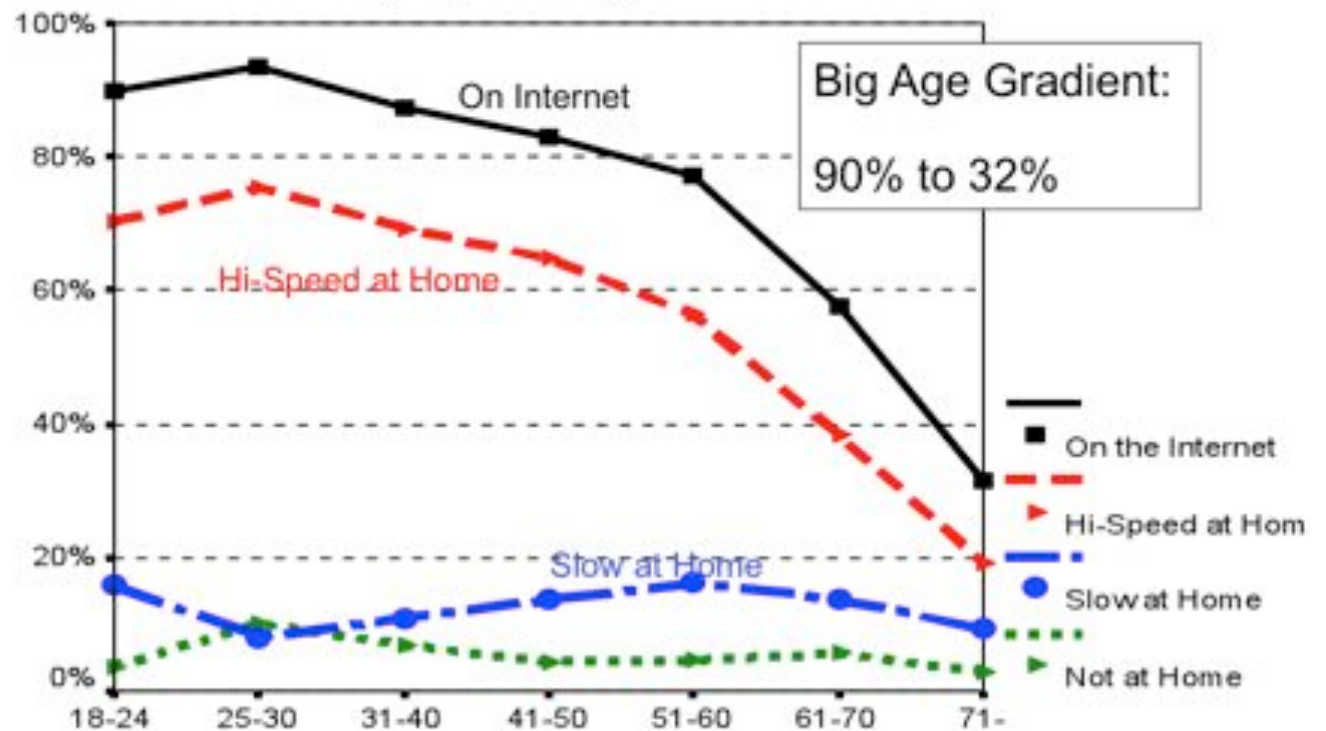
# Reinforcing Social Divisions





# Reinforcing Social Divisions

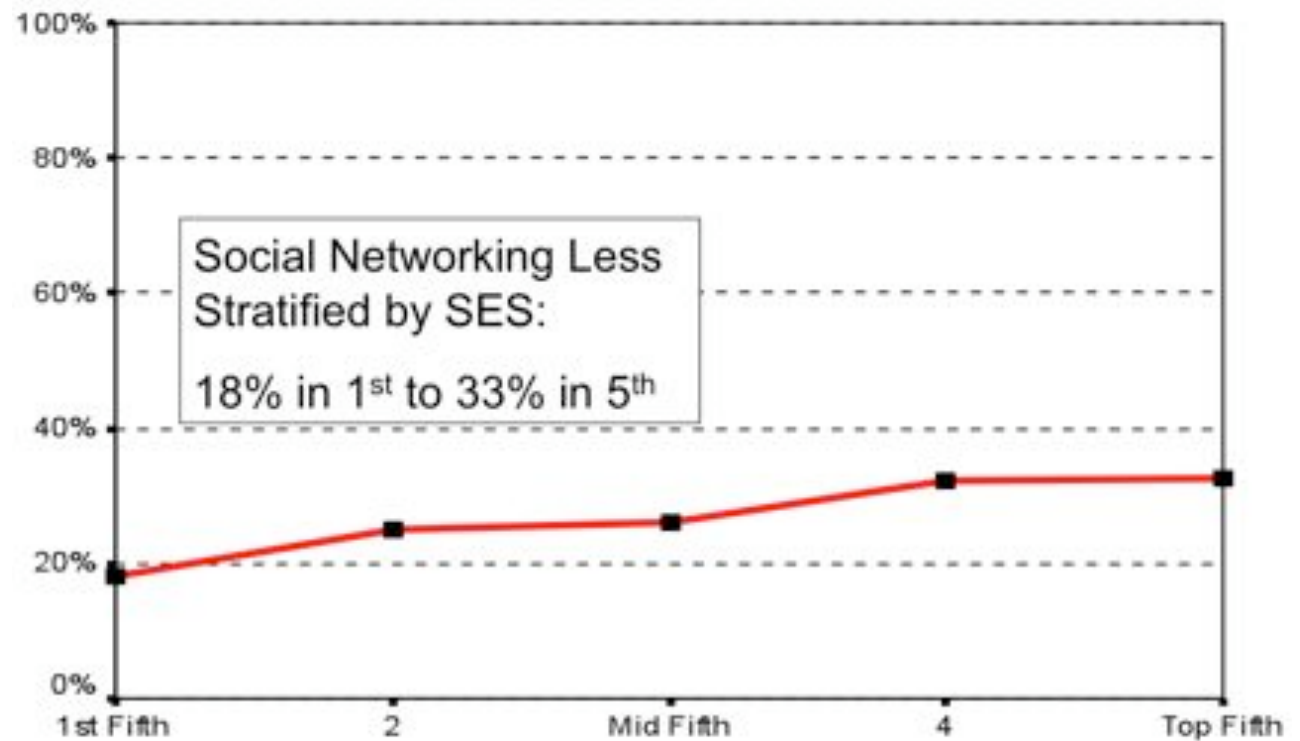
Percent on Internet and by Connection Type  
by Age Categories





# Reinforcing (some) Social Divisions

Percent Using Social Networking Sites  
by Socio-Economic Level







# Does the Internet Unify Community?

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# Is the Internet a Community?

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Social implications of 'cyberspace', 'the infosphere' etc.

## **A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace**

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone.....You have no sovereignty where we gather.

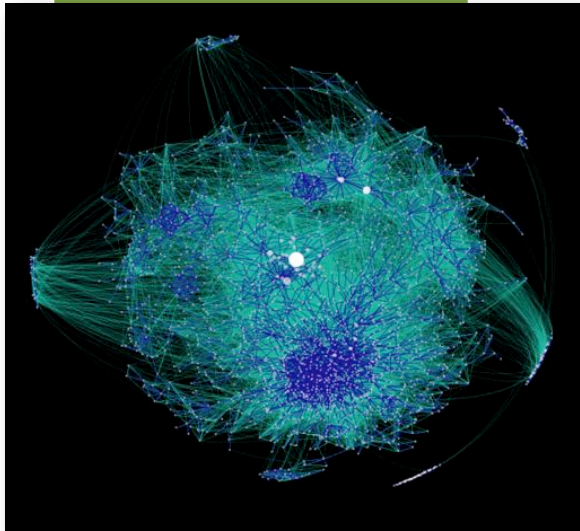
...I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. ...

...You have not engaged in our great and gathering conversation, nor did you create the wealth of our marketplaces. You do not know our culture, our ethics, or the unwritten codes that already provide our society more order than could be obtained by any of your impositions.

John Perry Barlow, Electronic Frontier Foundation, 1996



# Is the Internet a Community?



visualization of the  
blogosphere

Cf. James F. Moore (Berkman Center), on "the global consciousness of the second superpower":

The Internet and other interactive media continue to penetrate more and more deeply all world society..The collective power of texting, blogging, instant messaging, and email across millions of actors cannot be overestimated. Like a mind constituted of millions of inter-networked neurons, the social movement is capable of astonishingly rapid and sometimes subtle community consciousness and action... the emergent democracy of the second superpower is alive with touching and being touched by each other, as the community works to create wisdom and to take action....



# The Consequences of Disaggregation:

The "siloeing" of public discourse: a vanishing Common Ground?

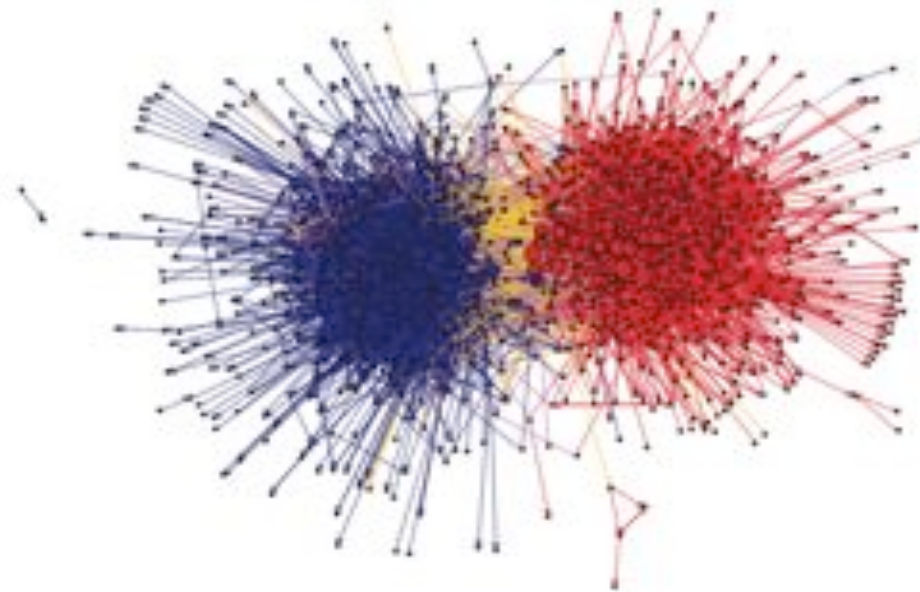


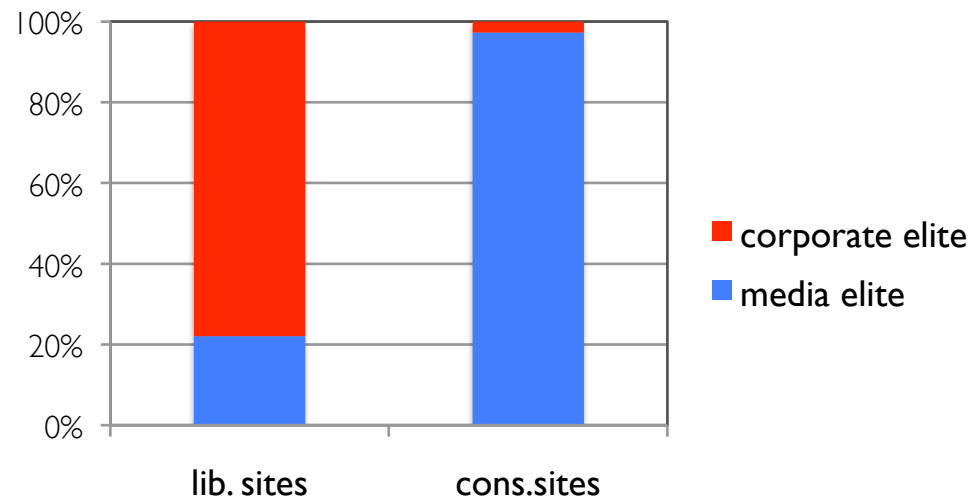
Figure 1: Community structure of political blogs (expanded set), shown using utilizing a GEM layout [31] in the GUESS[3] visualization and analysis tool. The colors reflect political orientation, red for conservative, and blue for liberal. Orange links go from liberal to conservative, and purple ones from conservative to liberal. The size of each blog reflects the number of other blogs that link to it.



# Polarized Language

Lexical Choice:

Ideological: contested concepts



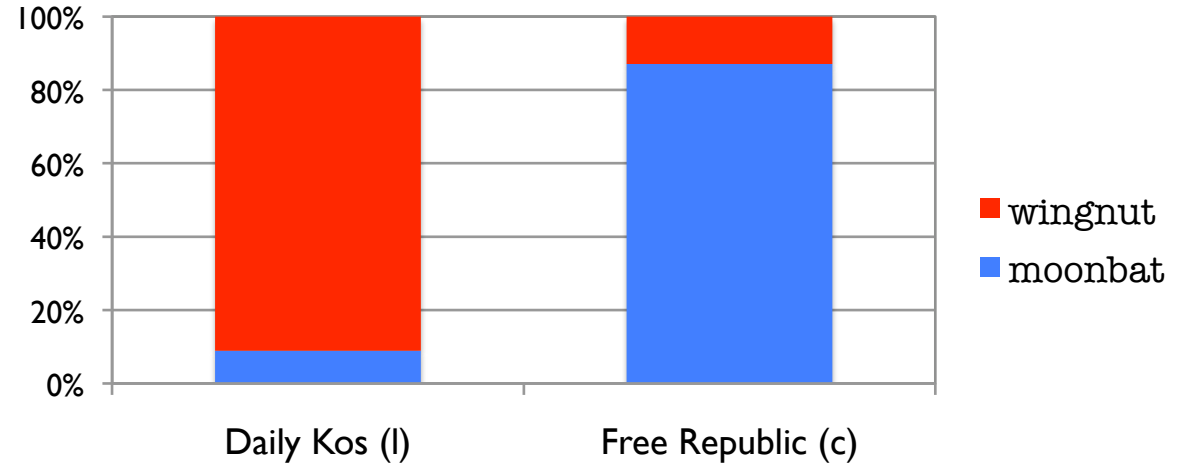


# Polarized Language

Lexical Choice:

"Stylistic":

cf frequency of political epithets





## Lower-Casing the internet?

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"Effective with this sentence, Wired News will no longer capitalize the "I" in internet. At the same time, Web becomes web and Net becomes net. Why? The simple answer is because there is no earthly reason to capitalize any of these words. Actually, there never was... a change in our house style was necessary to put into perspective what the internet is: another medium for delivering and receiving information. That it transformed human communication is beyond dispute. But no more so than moveable type did in its day. Or the radio. Or television." *Wired*, 8/16/04

(Cf earlier capitalization of "the Radio" and "the Cinema.")



# Social Effects of the Internet

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The Internet potentially amplifies and enhances all forms of social organization

... But doesn't eliminate basic conflicts and oppositions...





# Good Bye and Good Luck

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