The Internet: Social Effects

History of Information 103
Geoff Nunberg

April 27, 2010
The Internet and "virtual community"
One world language?
Social life in a virtual world
Reinforcing Social Divisions?
Is the Internet a place?
The Internet: Social Consequences

Does the internet build communities or fragment them?
The Internet: Social Consequences

Does the internet build communities or fragment them?

Yes.
### Social Effects of the Internet

#### Cairncross's determined trendspotting

| 1. Death of distance       | 14. Manufacturers as Service Providers |
| 2. Fate of Location        | 15. Inversion of Home and Office       |
| 3. Improved Connections    | 16. Proliferation of Ideas            |
| 4. Increased Mobility      | 17. Decline of National Authority     |
| 5. More Customized Networks| 18. Loss of Privacy                   |
| 7. Increased Value of Brand| 20. Rebirth of Cities                 |
| 9. More Competition        | 22. Communities of Culture            |
| 10. Increased Value of Niches| 23. A New Trust                      |
| 12. Loose-Knit Corporation Culture| 25. Global Peace             |
| 13. Openness               |                                          |
One World Language?
The Internationalization of the Web

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
Fears of English Hegemony...

“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
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 and 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 in millions of users

- English: 499.2
- Chinese: 407.7
- Spanish: 139.8
- Japanese: 96.0
- Portuguese: 77.6
- German: 72.3
- Arabic: 60.3
- French: 57.0
- Russian: 45.3
- Korean: 37.5
- All the rest: 309.7

Internet Penetration Moves toward Equalization…

Penetration increases most sharply in Africa, Middle East, Latin America…

### WORLD INTERNET USAGE AND POPULATION STATISTICS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>991,002,342</td>
<td>4,514,400</td>
<td>86,217,900</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>1,809.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>3,808,070,503</td>
<td>114,304,000</td>
<td>764,435,900</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>568.8%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>803,850,858</td>
<td>105,096,093</td>
<td>425,773,571</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>305.1%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>202,687,005</td>
<td>3,284,800</td>
<td>58,309,546</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>1,675.1%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>340,831,831</td>
<td>108,096,800</td>
<td>259,561,000</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>140.1%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>586,662,468</td>
<td>18,068,919</td>
<td>186,922,050</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>934.5%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania / Australia</td>
<td>34,700,201</td>
<td>7,620,480</td>
<td>21,110,490</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>177.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORLD TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,767,805,208</strong></td>
<td><strong>360,985,492</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,802,330,457</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>399.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: (1) Latest Internet User Data from World Internet Usage Statistics December 31, 2009 (2) UNESCO data used
Web encourages the spread of English.... And maintenance and spread of smaller national, regional, and ethnic languages
Social Life in a Virtual World

17. Decline of National Authority

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"

Cf the "virtual corporation," "smart mobs," moveon.org, etc., which are said to facilitate direct democracy
The Rise of “Virtual Communities,”

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.
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

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.
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.
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

Relation of online media to social groups

- Supports
- Amplifies/extends
- Transforms
- Creates

high-school alums
Book History list
MeetUp
leukemia dl
Varieties of Online Community

Relation of online media to social groups

- Supports
- Amplifies /extends
- Transforms
- Creates

But what about Facebook?
Reinforcing Social Divisions
“During the school year 2006-2007, a division emerged between MySpace and Facebook. At the beginning of the year, a common question in American schools was: “Are you on MySpace?” By the end of the year, the question had shifted to “MySpace or Facebook?” As Facebook started gaining momentum, some teenagers switched from MySpace to Facebook. Others joined Facebook without having ever been on MySpace. Still others chose to adopt both. During this period, MySpace did not lose traction. Teens continued to flock to the site, opting for MySpace in lieu of or in addition to Facebook.

Slowly, a distinction emerged. Those who adopted MySpace were from different backgrounds and had different norms and values than those who adopted Facebook.”

danah boyd, Berkman Center
Reinforcing Social Divisions

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type
by Socio-Economic Level

Big SES Gradient:
44% in 1st to 99% in 5th
Reinforcing Social Divisions

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type
by Age Categories

Big Age Gradient:
90% to 32%
Reinforcing (some) Social Divisions

Percent Using Social Networking Sites
by Socio-Economic Level

Social Networking Less Stratified by SES:
18% in 1st to 33% in 5th
Social Divisions are Less Evident in Social Networking

Percent Using Social Networking Sites
by Socio-Economic Level

Social Networking Less Stratified by SES:
18% in 1st to 33% in 5th
But Sharp Social Divisions in Political Participation

Percent Web Political Acts and Social Networking by Socio-Economic Level

Web Political Acts Much More SES Stratified than Social Networking:
11% in 1st to 65% in 5th
Activity pyramid: Online pursuits by generation

- Active engagement with social media (visit SNS, create SNS profile, create blogs)
- More advanced online entertainment (download videos, music and podcasts)
- More advanced communication and passive social media use (instant messaging, visit SNS, read blogs)
- Basic online entertainment (online videos, playing games)
- E-commerce (online shopping, banking, and travel reservations)
- Research and information gathering (product research, news, health and religious information searches)
- Email and search

The majority of teens and Gen Y use SNS, but fewer maintain blogs. Less than a fifth of online adults older than Gen X use SNS.

While there are always exceptions, older generations typically do not engage with the internet past e-commerce.

The vast majority of online adults use all generations uses email and search engines.
Does the Internet Unify Community?
"The new electronic independence recreates the world in the image of a global village." Marshall McLuhan

Don't think of the Internet as a broadcast medium...think of it as a conversational space. Conversation is the opposite of marketing. It's talking in our own voices about things we want to hear about." David Weinberger, Marketing consultant and Internet adviser to the Dean campaign

“'The power of elites to determine what [is] news via a tightly controlled dissemination system [has been] shattered. The ability and authority to distribute text are now truly democratized” Hugh Hewitt
Is the Internet a Community?

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....
Is the Internet a Community?

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
Polarization and the "Siloing" of Political Discourse

Online discourse facilitates "siloing" of political discourse…

But siloing has independent offline roots
Polarization and the "Siloing" of Political Discourse

Reds talk to reds, blues talk to blues

Lada Adamic & Nathalie Glance, 2005, "Divided They Blog"

Polarization also evident in topic choice, etc.

Figure 1: Community structure of political blogs (expanded set), shown using utilizing a GEM layout [11] in the GUESS 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.
Ruptured Discourses

Figure 4.4: This figure maps traffic among the top 50 political Websites, as of May 2006. Liberal- or Democratic-leaning sites are in blue; conservative- or Republican-leaning sites are in red. Self-declared neutral or nonpartisan sites are in gray.
Polarization by gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Male readership (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>DailyKos.com</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Eschaton (Atrios)</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Crooks and liars</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>RedState.org</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Wonkette</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Andrew Sullivan</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Kevin Drum</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Hugh Hewitt</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"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
Social Effects of the Internet

The Internet potentially amplifies and enhances all forms of social organization

… But doesn't eliminate basic conflicts and oppositions…