The Emerging Blogging-Techno-Evolution's Impact on Globalization

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Globalization carries a variety of preconceived notions, most of which instigate a negative reaction. To many it represents an era of false promises of prosperity and international equality, delivering nothing more than exploitation while benefiting only the minority at the expense of the majority. This has spurred a global wave of "protests against the policies and actions by institutions of globalization" [Stiglitz, 2002]. In fact to some, "[t]he relationship between free market democracy and ethnic violence around the world is inextricably bound up with globalization" [Chua, 2003].

And although the new strategy for globalization in the 1990s caused many hardships and was plagued by flaws in its implementation, it represented an era of unprecedented individual empowerment. "The type of globalization that emerged in the early 1990s did have several unique, unprecedented features. The most important of these differentiating traits is that the changes of the 1990s greatly expanded the options available to individuals while narrowing the room of maneuver available to governments" [Naim, 2003]. It has enabled common individuals to share and express themselves freely with other likeminded persons throughout the world by reducing the costs for both communications and international travel.

The most notable technological revolution during the 1990s was the advent and integration of the Internet into all corners of life. Never in the history of mankind have so many people been able to learn so much about other people's lives, products and ideas. The Internet has revolutionized how individuals are now exchanging ideologies, products and information. But this forum isn't similar to the radio, the last major mass-distribution

communication technology, which is primarily one-directional. Instead, the Internet facilitates a bi-directional conversation between geographical dispersed users, while at the same time, bypassing normal governmental controls and the massive multinational media corporations (which dilute stories into common, easy to swallow laymen abstracts of the real news).

Through this collective exchange, individuals are now able to rally support for their agendas on the global scale. This can be applied when talking about human rights, social activism, charity, environmentalism, terrorism, first-hand reporting of current events, and even financial markets. "[A]s the Internet proliferates, it is going to become the turbocharged engine that drives globalization forward. The Internet will ensure that how we communicate, how we invest and how we look at the world will be increasingly global" [Friedman, 2000].

Not only has the Internet redefined the term communication; there is no escaping this wave. No country can cut itself off from the global media; nor can it prevent its citizens from connecting to this World Wide Web. Developing nations included. As Thomas Friedman noted, "What makes the Internet so dangerous for police states is that they can't afford not to have it, because they will fall behind economically if they do. But if they have it, it means they simply can't control information the way they once did. And what's really scary about the Internet for regimes such as China's is that it's interactive, it's alive" [Friedman, 2000]. And the rate at which individuals around the world are connecting is not slowing, but in fact rapidly expanding. According to the A.T Kearney/Foreign Policy Globalization Index, "as the world economy slowed, Internet growth in poor countries and increased cross-border travel deepened global links" [AT

Kearney, 2004]. It's not just the developed western societies of England and the United States leveraging the benefits from the Internet.

This revolution turned global as globalization continued to be at the forefront of the world's economic and political agendas throughout the 1990s, and most notably in the 21st Century. According to AT Kearney/Foreign Policy, in 2002, Internet connections continued to surge, with 130 million new users connecting, bringing the total to more than 620 million, or 9.9 percent of the world's population. Growth in developing countries was noted to be the key force behind this expansion, as they added users three to four times faster than developed nations. "In China, the number of Internet users rose 75 percent in 2002; in Brazil, 78.5 percent; and in India, 136 percent" [AT Kearney, 2004]. Furthermore, according to the U.N Conference on Trade and Development, it's estimated that if these rates continue, Internet users in developing countries could constitute more than half the world within five years.

Despite the digital divide being bridged for total number of connected users, there still exists a disparity when comparing the infrastructures of developed and developing nations. Developing countries only account for less than 10 percent of worldwide Internet hosts. "This trend suggests that users in developing countries are competing among themselves for access to a much smaller number of computers connected to the Internet and probably have little access to local Internet content" [AT Kearney]. Fundamentally, this means local individuals are integrated into the Internet by a pseudo-one-directional connection. They have the ability to read, and at times communicate (through email or instant messaging), but they don't have the means to publish their own

content for mass, unsolicited viewing. To do so would require a knowledge of website design and a hosting infrastructure (consisting of servers, connections and facilities).

The largest barrier to increasing the infrastructure and per capita servers in developing nations is the high cost of lighting the "last mile". And although it has been suggested, to resolve this infrastructure gap, developing nations should explore the implementation and renationalization of their network backbones [Lurie, 2004], it's much more feasible to leverage emerging communication technologies to pursue the propagation of local ideologies and information.

One such technology is called "Blogging". Simply, Blogging allows remote users to publish their own, online diary that's accessible to anyone connected to the Internet. The main advantage of this system is it doesn't require the author to know website design and/or have the resources to host the content. The Blogging service includes all that within its interface. And it is accessible for maintenance so long as the user is connected to the web (most administration portals are web-based graphical user interfaces). Therefore, the leveraging of this technology by individuals provides them a forum in which they can share their own ideas and information for free. This could represent a real time report on local contemporary hostilities to local working conditions for a multinational corporation's manufacturing facility.

Blogging differs from other online collaboration technologies, like social-networking which "exploits a web of social and professional acquaintances much broader than the ones [people] maintain in everyday life" [Fitzgerald, 2004] because of the anonymity afforded to the author. This is actually one of its most applicable traits when being used to empower individuals. One can create a virtual penname (or call sign) and

consequently provide frank reports about the local state of affairs (from an individual perspective) without the fear of retaliation or discrimination. The applications for this technology are boundless, as it truly empowers the individual with their own voice and their own outlet by providing an avenue that escapes censorship and one where they are the administrator and author.

Complications for the implementation of this technology arise once users are empowered in such way. By providing the average (and every) individual with a candid outlet for their own expression, two main data-mining obstacles are encountered: the first involves how to sort, search, and be kept informed of new information as it becomes available; the second is more problematic, how should this enormous amount of data be presented so that it's useful?

In order to stay abreast of the current affairs happening within your area of interest it's imperative that information be consumed regularly. But as the list of must read blogs steadily increases as more users turn to this technology, the more insurmountable the mountain of data becomes. That's where RSS, or "rich site summary" comes into play. "RSS lets publishers use XML code to define the content of their web sites … [w]ith RSS, visitors can access multiple sites without having to go to each one … by way of an aggregator, which sends headlines and links to a browser or a downloadable news reader on [a] mobile device or desktop" [Jardin, 2004]. This allows an interested end-user to sift through hundreds (or thousands) of blogs efficiently, so they can follow through on the most important information at that time. It basically allows for sorting of the world's voices into small, manageable abstracts. "RSS many not save you time, but it'll help pack more info into the time you have" [Jardin, 2004].

Having abstracts of information sent to you, instead of having to read the entire blog entry (or constantly hit "Refresh" to see the latest content) is useful if you have narrowed your information feed to only a few sources, relatively speaking. But what happens if you want to survey locals from western China? You can't possibly imagine scouring through all their blogs, compile the data and in turn deduct some reasonable conclusions in a sane amount of time. This is the niche that Google found when dealing with the World Wide Web (where at present day it's estimated that there is roughly 6 terabytes of html-text data). If using the figures from the U.N Conference on Trade and Development (that half of the world population will be online within 5 years), it can be estimated (at an average of 1 blog entry per person per day and with each blog averaging 1k) that there would be roughly 3 terabytes of new information generated every day. Indexing this information, using present day technology, is not a processing bottleneck, as today there are indexing applications that can process all the content in the Internet in one day. But presenting a condensed report of this information, or links to useful entries, to the end user poses a major challenge; one that seems to be missing from today's computer-science research initiatives. It is not only the processing of 3 times N-days worth of data, but how to present the results, especially because the end users of this technology will cover the full breadth of goals present in society. This could range from politicians looking for contemporary and accurate polls, to human rights activists researching manufacturing conditions, worldwide, for a company's plants.

The possibilities and uses of blogging and its results are endless and must be confronted. Today's Internet phenomena continues to spread in its global reach, and will soon be the medium that empowers every individual worldwide. Although what was

promised in the 1990s was immediate financial success and world equality what was delivered was the potential to empower the people of the world to amass at their own freewill and to share information and ideologies freely without the interruption of censorship or high communication costs. "Despite powerful counter-trends, the integration of world economies, politics, and cultures continues to define our time. Governments, businesses, families, or individuals that ignore or misunderstand its nature, its virtues, and vices will do so at their peril" [Naim, 2003]. Present-day economics dictate that most developing countries will not see a profound increase in their information infrastructures. Instead, as a global society, blogging technologies appear to be the catalyst to giving every individual a voice.

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