

Social maturity of WWW and AI feedback: opportunities for an additional human revolution

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In these days, Internet Adoption Curve in developed countries belongs to an interval between early majority and late majority. There is already a significant population profile which can be defined as 'digital natives', more or less isolated from their 'digital immigrants' thanks to the abyss defined by the decisive integration of Internet in digital natives' daily lives. This situation is actually significant if one takes in mind that digital persona of digital natives is much more than a mirror of, let's say, actual persona and both belongs to a new, multifaced entity still not well understood.

As Adoption Curve has progressed, the complete range of social software has been under a harsh darwinist pressure. The most important selection factor has been the social success of each social software via personal, collective and professional impact. Some social software has not resisted 'Net pace (i.e., gopher orarchie); other types have achieved and maintained the status of killer application; finally, new types of social software has emerged in the last fifteen years. From blogs and their metareality (blogosphere/The Conversation), wikis and other collaborative spaces, to the last big social network, multidimensional products (Facebook, MySpace, etc.). Second life and another previous attempts (like VRML, X3D, etc.) have shown clearly that main ingredient of success is not cutting edge technologies (beyond the bare minimums for make things work, very close to commodities in these days), but uses and images that the users produces about each technology: what they can do with each kind of social software by themselves alone or in company of other peers. Twitter, del.icio.us or digg are just three examples chosen from a huge pool which proof that simple and clear interfaces are not obstacles toward success at all.

Social evolution of Internet, its way to its maturity after teen crisis (web 1.0), has carried with it specific successes utterly unforeseeable both because of their magnitude and potential. One of the most clear examples would be Wikipedia. A reference space generated freely (discharging maintenance costs), feeded by huge numbers of amateurs/microexperts and totally usable by any individual with connection to Internet. Beyond casuistics in Web 2.0, true essence of social impact of a social mature Internet would be the unending amount of ways in which knowledge, communication and activism can be shared and builded: all that can be done with and for other people. Digital citizen, both native or immigrant, can make use of possibilities of personal, professional and collective development that just weren't foreseen, beyond the direct dream of Science Fiction, wider and deeper than River World or Foundation. It is possible that, in fact, this circumstance has take part of science-fiction decadence.

A priori, there is no clear signs of a deceleration of the change pace. Indeed, since web 2.0 has gained popularity as a concept (more or less, half a year after O'Reilly conferences when term was conceived), there has been no interruption of announcement of new and then quickly popular new social software, with a significant public and media impact. However, there is a fact which is determining clearly the evolution of all the social software: information overload.

This net of human for humans, this eclectic set of services and documents has reached a point in its path in which Internet power users adapt themselves as good as they can to a quantity of information received at a pace without precedents at all. There are clearer and clearer signs of that there is no intellectual and even no biological tools for copying with that magnitudes of information. Search engines are just too good and efficient, and social software types are just too attractive for some population profiles.

The worst fact is not the human impossibility of overcome information overload, but the effects of that situation. The abused term of multitasking (applied to human beings) is coming with a serious price, the difficulty of maintain deep thought. Some of the benefits of social software are quickly evolving into created necessities, and this new condition contributes to explain the problem mentioned just before.

There is no way to assure if definition and transition to some web 3.0 compromise is an urgent needing or not. If finally Internet obtains a framework in which software tools (agents) can operate with information at its level, this would mean a decisive step forward.

This scenario could evolve into a state of continuous positive feedback. Until now, interaction between different social software has permitted an evolution which pace is only surpassed by its consequences. As I affirmed lines above, unavoidably out of control growth of possibilities of access to information has reach a state of use of Internet with clearly negative consequences in different aspects of daily life and professional activity. If finally emerges a way of improve user's capability of cope with The Problem of information overload, it will have consequences both unforeseeable and deep: if the user can cope adequately with information overload and gains the possibility of access and operate with quantities of information even bigger, it would produce decisive effects both to individuals and communities.

If some part of natural intelligence is based in the capability of capture and work with information and produce new results as new information, an improved access to Internet information would improve the intellectual

capabilities of the population. If some of the ways than AI can offer for overcome information overload obtain certain success, abyss between digital native, digital immigrant and digital refugee would be a tiny step compared with the (nasty) future that waits for those who cannot obtain benefits from this developments.

This possible future is needing urgently solid analysis in order of potentiate the positive benefits and minimize the negative ones. Social disadjustments can dwarf every other previous generational shock. Intellectual impact can reach a state of dystopia clearly comparable with "Logan's run" but without the imaginery of Carroussel: all those people that wouldn't be able to adapt and obtain the new condition of "augmented human being" would be too much close to be considered as living fossiles, parts of a past that still hasn't learned that future is here right now and for stay.

As a conclusion, interaction between AI technologies and the Web is close to be in a critical moment: every time is clearer that AI is needed for overcome web 2.0 information overload. However, if this combination obtain a remarkable success, it can produce deeper social effects (positives and negatives) by far compared with any other previous technologies, keeping in mind that they would affect the core of cognitive capabilities of human being. As digital divide of today can be just a tiny step compared with the abysm derived from AI success, I do believe that reflection and analysis of it is an urgent necessity, specially if it reach the sphere of public debate. Maybe this time we will be able of maintain Pandora's box closed.