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## Social Network Dynamics and Participatory Politics by Ross Mayfield

A disruptive movement is underway with the Internet being used for social means. The creative destruction of the tech boom gave us a legacy of physical infrastructure largely meant for transactions and email communication to build upon. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum, people connected and used the Internet as a social tool. As a critical mass of mature users gathered in simple ways and co-created social infrastructure, complex patterns emerged.

It began with innovators at the tip of the technology adoption lifecycle. Geeks and hackers used the Internet for more than a platform, but having conversations about it, themselves and what they were building it for. The commercialization of industry research, the constraints of propriety on invention, the moves of monopolists and open standards became rallying issues. The open source, or free (as in “freedom”) software movement was born.

Open source didn’t just open a Pandora’s Box for the software industry it was the emergence of an entirely new method of production based upon social interaction and low transaction costs. In “Coase’s Penguin, or Linux and the Nature of the Firm,” New York University Law Professor Jochai Benkler described this 15-year-old phenomenon as “commons-based peer production” in contrast to the property and contract-based models of markets and hierarchies described by Economists Ronald Coase and Oliver Williamson. Social signals, rather than price or managerial demands, drive

contributions and coordination.<sup>1</sup> Benkler identified the systemic efficiencies of a model based on self-organization for resource allocation. A model of disruptive efficiency—driven by social network dynamics.

During the boom we thought frictionless communication of price would revolutionize industry after industry. But price alone favors incumbents. Indeed, the commoditization of everything is underway, but competing in commodity industries initially favors the economies of scale and speed that larger vertically integrated firms are positioned to realize. Assets of scaled production can be leverage to compete on volume. The disruption of business-to-consumer and business-to-business e-commerce and other alphabet economies was only televised.

Somewhere along the way we forgot that underpinning each transaction was a relationship. At scale this means financial credit. But there is value in the small. The smaller transactions that are underpinned by social capital yield emergent patterns that are perhaps more disruptive.

The technology adoption lifecycle rolls on towards later adoption – software, media, politics and other sectors are being disrupted by social infrastructure by order of their reliance on information goods.

## Ecosystem of Networks

Perhaps the most visible of the disruptive technologies that make up the social software ecosystem is Weblogs. Commonly understood as personal publishing tools, they have indeed made publishing accessible because of their simplicity in form and low cost (free in many cases). But the value of a weblog is greater than giving an individual a voice and power of blogs is much greater than the sum of its parts.

In “Power-laws, Weblogs and Inequality,”<sup>2</sup> Clay Shirky highlighted that the structure of blogspace is a Power law. When you sort blogs by the number of links to them, the value of the Nth position is  $1/N$  (the second in rank has one-half the links of the first, the third in rank has one-third the rank of the first and so on). This paints a picture of blogs as publishing, where the most connected nodes hold the most value.

What’s notable about a power law distribution (a scale-free network) is that it is an efficient structure at scale. Particularly in distribution

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.benkler.org/CoasesPenguin.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw\\_weblog.html](http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html)

of memes, following Sarnoff's Law where the value of the network is the number of nodes it broadcasts to, a cluster of highly connected nodes can indeed transmit information throughout the network.

Shirky's paper caused a stir in blogspace because it was interpreted to mean that the "A-list" bloggers at the top of the power law ranking held all the power. This is contrary to the experience of your average blogger and the ideals that a fit meme from a less popular blog could reach all of blogspace through social filtering.

How the A-list got to prominence and retains it is "preferential attachment,"<sup>3</sup> the desire for a new node to connect to the most connected nodes. Shirky did point out that besides blogs as publishing there were other modalities, blogging classic and blogs as dinner conversation. He saw the activity of blogging for your average person as something closer to a dinner conversation, read and converse with a small group of friends. He saw a scale above that as how blogging was at its inception, a knowable social network. It just so happened that that early knowable network became the top of a very big and growing pyramid that was adding to its base at a rate of 10,000 blogs per day.

Similar to how different physics at the nanometer scale allow the creation of new technologies, when you look closer at the power-law you find different patterns. Duncan Watts observed, "when you ratchet up the requirements for what is a connection, connections diminish."<sup>4</sup>

Fundamentally, not all links are created equal. If you link to Joi Ito's blog, does that mean you are friends? If he links back? What the heck does "friend" mean anyway? You see, while Joi may have access to the best technologies, he is still constrained by time and neurological capabilities for maintaining relationships. The only category you can put all links to [joi.ito.com](http://joi.ito.com) is that they are representative affiliations, indicating that someone identified with him enough to link to him.

The problem is conversational relationships are not scale-free. Its impossible to have running conversations with thousands of people, recall who they are and maintain social context.

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3[http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0452284392/ref=pd\\_sim\\_books\\_1/002-5054519-2389639?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0452284392/ref=pd_sim_books_1/002-5054519-2389639?v=glance&s=books)

4 <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0393041425?v=glance>

Robin Dunbar postulated that group size is constrained by the size of the neocortical physiology<sup>5</sup>. The ratio of the size of the neocortex to total brain mass can project the maximum expected group size for a species. His work suggests that a person can only track the social relationships of a group of 150 people at any given time.

Its conversations that let us keep a mental network map of our social groups. Informal inter-personal communication, such as gossip or idle chit-chat, helps us understand who is relating to who in our little circles. We happen upon new ties or invoke latent ones from the past, but still, our buffer maxes out at 150.

Scaling group size beyond 150 requires hierarchy and formalized communication. While this helps organizations realize economies of scale and speed, it comes at a cost of social capital and intellectual capital that realize economies of span and scope. In other words, once formalized as process, its difficult to change. Recognizing this theoretical constraint is important for software and organizational design, but its more important to recognize it is an existing structure in blogspace, with most blogs receiving approximately 150 links.<sup>6</sup>

There is an even deeper level of relationships than informal ties. People we love, work with closely. Malcom Gladwell, the author of *The Tipping Point*, who discusses Robin Dunbar's work also postulates another group size based upon intimacy. When most people are asked to list persons that would be deeply affected if they die, a measure of strong relationships; the average list is of 12 people. Not so coincidentally, workgroups start to burst into flames at this scale, with the optimal organizational form for everyday work being closer to eight.

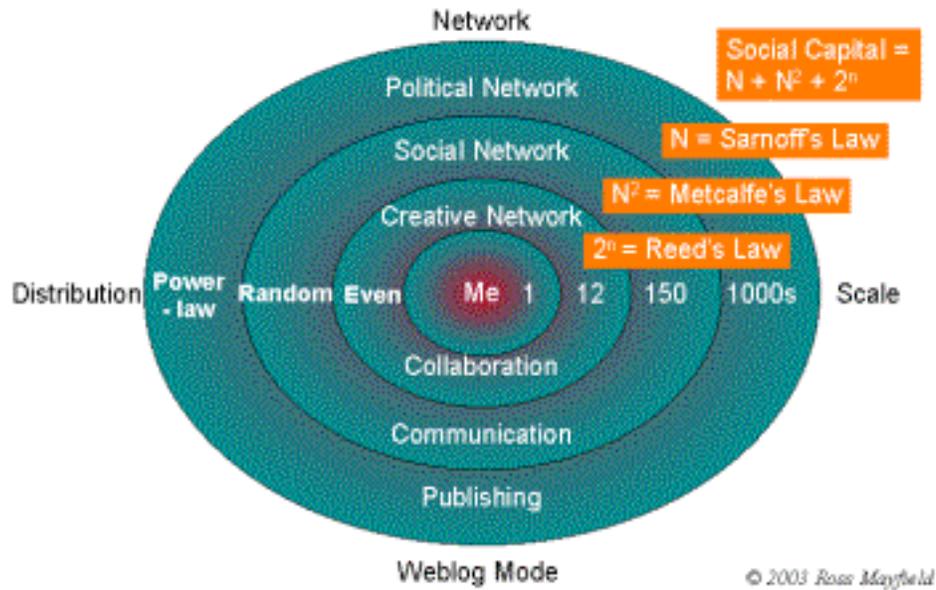
Taking into consideration that groups behave differently at different scales, each demanding different modalities for interaction and the natural constraints for each scale, we can postulate a framework for thinking about the ecosystem of networks:

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<sup>5</sup> Robin Dunbar, "Co-evolution of neocortex size, group size and language in humans," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 16 (1993), pp. 681-735.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.technorati.com/bloglinks.html>

# Ecosystem of Networks



Network Layer	Scale	Distribution of Links	Social Capital	Weblog Modality
<b>Political Network</b>	1000s	Power-law (Scale-free)	Sarnoff's Law, N	Publishing
<b>Social Network</b>	150	Random (Bell Curve)	Metcalfe's Law, N <sup>2</sup>	Communication
<b>Creative Network</b>	12	Event (Flat)	Reed's Law, 2 <sup>N</sup>	Collaboration

People use weblogs in different modes: Publishing; Communication and; Collaboration. Because of dramatically lowering the cost for these modes of communication on the public Internet people are rapidly increasing the value of social capital through the act of communicating. Each mode provides different valuation methods:

- **Publishing:** Sarnoff's Law says the value of a network is proportionate to the number of subscribers.
- **Communication:** Metcalfe's Law says the value of a network is proportionate to the number of links.

- **Collaboration:** Reed's Law says the value of a network is proportionate to the number of groups.

This model radically changes the power-law equation and equality. While the nodes at the peak of the power-law have the most “power” to disseminate their views, the network as a whole gains greater value from smaller scales.

Blogspace is a large complex adaptive system with emergent properties. Creative networks deliberate and construct memes. Social networks, uh, socialize them. When a meme reaches the right node in a political network it can reach escape velocity. All these networks overlap (the A-list socializes too) and are different from each node’s perspective. But the resulting heterarchy provides a path for memes to emerge from creative to social to political layers, undergoing a phase transition at each step – allowing the best content and expertise to rise to the top naturally. This is in stark contrast to hierarchical structures which are designed for control down and information flow up, but routinely impede information flow because of control as a check and the absence of lateral flow as a balance. Bloggers provide intelligence for what is of value with each link they vote with.

## Talking about social software

Clay Shirky defines “social software” as software that “treats groups as first class objects in the system. In other words, it treats triads differently than pairs. What’s important about this distinction is that social systems can be broken down into triads, and no further; and when A connects to B and B to C, then a transitive relationship between A and C is possible.”<sup>7</sup> Even more abstractly, I define Social Software as software that adapts to its environment rather than requiring the environment to adapt to it. Reason being, software is rarely executed without a social context.

Traditional enterprise software, for example, has focused on automating business processes. It institutes structure, business rules and rigid ontologies to realize efficiencies for transactions and reporting. This approach has three notable drawbacks. Much of knowledge work is unstructured, the domain of business practice, not process. Second, most business processes become out of date when they are created because of new environmental information. Third, it is designed by experts instead of users; and attempts to take change out of how the system is used. As a result, users default to email and attachments for most of their work.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.blackbeltjones.com/work/mt/archives/000472.html>>

This isn't to say that traditional systems and processes are not of value. IT provides productivity gains from automation and when processes provide social agreement for how to work together, according to Erik Brynjolfsson.<sup>8</sup> It's primarily that social systems are just beginning to accommodate the unstructured nature of knowledge work that is business practice (or, ad hoc processes), which accommodates informal social networks<sup>9</sup>. Creating such social software means giving greater control to users to shape their own networks and information architecture in a dynamic environment.

## What's So Different about Social Software?

Groups have been forming for longer than the Internet. Online communities are not new, so what's new here? What may be different is greater understanding of the role social networks play in forming communities. Howard Reingold, in *Smart Mobs*, highlighted the difference between networks and groups:

Every time you interact with another person you potentially exchange information about and from people you each know. The structure of everyone's links to everyone else is a network that acts as a channel through which news, job tips, possible romantic partners and contagious diseases travel. Social networks can be measured and interconnections can be charted, from relationships between interlocking boards of directors of major corporations to terrorist networks. One of Wellman's claims is that "we find community in networks, not groups." He explained that "a group is a special type of network: densely-knit (most people are directly connected), tightly-bounded (most ties stay within the densely-knit cluster) and multistranded (most ties contain many role relationships)"<sup>10</sup> and challenged conventional thinking about how people cluster socially:

"Although people often view the world in terms of groups, they function in networks. In networked societies: boundaries are permeable, interactions are with diverse others, connections switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies can be flatter and recursive. The change from groups to networks can

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<sup>8</sup><http://ebusiness.mit.edu/erik/JEP%20Beyond%20Computation%20BrynjolfssonHitt%207-121.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> *The Social Life of Information*, by John Seely Brown, Paul Duguid,

<sup>10</sup> Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking," in *the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25 (2001), Special Issue on "Networks, Class and Place," edited by Talja Blokland and Mike Savage.

be seen at many levels. Trading and political blocs have lost their monolithic character in the world system. Organizations form complex networks of alliance and exchange rather than cartels, and workers report to multiple peers and superiors. Management by multiply-connected network is replacing management by hierarchal tree and management by two-dimensional matrix. Communities are far-flung, loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit, and fragmentary. Most people operate in multiple, thinly-connected, partial communities as they deal with networks of kin, neighbours, friends, workmates and organizational ties. Rather than fitting into the same group as those around them, each person has his/her own “personal community.”<sup>11</sup>

Here’s a perhaps too simplistic framework to further draw out differences between the ideas of online community and social software that supports new group-forming activity:

#### **Online Communities**

- Top-down
- Place-centric
- Moderated
- Topic-driven
- Centralized
- Architected

#### **Social Software**

- Bottom-up
- People-centric
- User-controlled
- Context-driven
- Decentralized
- Self-organizing

To illustrate this, lets take an example from social networking and another from social software.

For example, consider Match.com as an online community vs. Friendster as a social networking service. Both serve the same market for online dating, but in vastly different ways. Match.com was architected by experts in how to match people. At a central site users fill out profiles, search profiles, are provided suggested connections according to a secret-sauce algorithm and then initiate contact. This is driven by profiles as topics. Moderators actually play a smaller role than other communities such as discussion lists, but do constantly tweak the algorithm as they are accountable for the quality of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Wellman, 2001.

service. Search benefits from the structure of profiles, which consequentially takes change out of the system.

By contrast, Friendster provides a social substrate. Profiles are put in social context (explicit representation of friends, interaction on discussion boards), which drives activity. Because of social context, actions risk social capital, providing a basis of trust. An iterative implicit reputation system governs from the edge, with the centralized authority playing only a nominal role. Instead of an advanced algorithm, users provide the intelligence for what matches should be made using implicit and tacit rationale. Search is constrained by a user’s location within the social network graph and degrees of distance (network horizon).

At last count, there were over 100 social networking services created and much talk of a “bubble” because of venture capital speculation. One framework for understanding these models is to categorize them by the markets they seek to cannibalize, such as dating, classified ads, recruiting and associations. But it is also helpful to segment them by how people connect using the service:

<b>Social Networking Models</b>		
<b>Network Type</b>	<b>Connection Method</b>	<b>Archetype</b>
Explicit	Declarative	Friendster, Orkut, Tribe.net
Virtual	Avatar	EverQuest
Physical	In-person	Meetup
Conversational	Communication	Weblogs
Private	Referral	LinkedIn

Of course, Friendster represents only a special brand of social context and serves certain facets of identity and makes explicit many things that should be implicit about relationships. With social networking, connection comes before content. With social software, content (actually, conversation) comes before connection. In the US in particular, there is a dearth of social capital. Say’s Law says that the market flocks to abundance until it becomes scarce. The growth of social networking—Orkut became 500<sup>th</sup> most-trafficked site within

two weeks of launch—can be partially attributable to the latent demand to connect.

Most notable exceptions to online communities as represented in the above framework actually suffer from openness. USENET, for example, was an online community that lacked centralized authority and design and remains open to participation. By consequence, spam degrades the health of the community, topic after topic.

The largest form of online community in use today is email discussion-lists. Moderators play a role in governing the community with issues such as spam. This maintains quality at a cost of openness. Quality itself is a moving target and maintaining scales participation creates significant administration costs and ambiguities.

By contrast, take Wikipedia.org, one of the largest social software communities. A wiki (Hawaiian for “quick”) is a collaboratively editable website that doesn’t require participants to learn HTML. The key feature is “Edit this Page” allowing anyone to edit anything at any time. Ward Cunningham invented the “Wiki Wiki Web” in 1995, spawning thousands of open source and commercial initiatives. Its counter-intuitive that giving up editing control to anyone that wants it actually works.

Wikipedia has demonstrated that collaborative editing can be constructive at scale and low cost – while maintaining quality. Andrea Ciffollili, in “Phantom authority, self-selective recruitment and retention of members in virtual communities: The Case of Wikipedia”<sup>12</sup> uses transaction cost analysis, team and club good theory to account for how wikis can deliver quality at a low cost and large scale of participation.

What's makes large scale wikis work includes:

- Low transaction costs for contribution and editing;
- A governance structure that hands over enforcement to users while allowing a core group to deal with major issues;
- Infinite storage capacity and logical space;
- De-emphasis of design to focus on content;
- De-emphasis of identity to focus on content;
- Fostering trust within participants by giving up control;
- Forking content creation from discussion about content.

An unknown number of anonymous contributors have helped build Wikipedia; 29,853 registered users of which 143 are administrators

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<sup>12</sup> [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue8\\_12/ciffollili/](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue8_12/ciffollili/)

and seven out have developer rights. This plus one founder that plays the role of “benevolent dictator.”

Unlike Slashdot, the prototypical example of an open self-organizing social software community with low administrative overhead, Wikipedia doesn't use an explicit reputation system. Instead, it functions at two levels. The first level, that of procedural authority, gives users the ability to contribute and edit at low transaction costs. The second level, institutional authority, is given to administrators.

About 150 administrators—there's that number again—a ceiling of cognizance for a social network. The eight people, a core group with developer's rights, is what some developers consider to be an optimal team size and within the boundaries of a creative network.

So behind the scenes of a successfully scaled community that empowers users is an active social network that relies on social practices that are not hard-coded or codified. The paper suggests that to scale further a reputation system may be required for this network, a major change to manage given the culture that reflects and drives its tools. Perhaps it should look for a set of new challenges to hand off to a new group of administrators to delay such a rash transition.

## Users as Developers

The very notion of a “consumer” is changing from someone that consumes to becoming a participant in the network of a vendor. Participants can rapidly spread favorable or damaging information about a product to their peers. Just as how the early days of the computing industry relied on user groups to provide support and learning, these groups now rapidly emerge to shape the experience of the service or product. Vendors that embrace this trend have to give up the pursuit of control and message to foster favorable network dynamics.

Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger originally retained control when they were developing Nupedia, a free online encyclopedia that did rely on volunteer contributions but used a traditional editorial process for maintaining quality. A year into the project they let go of this authority that decision spawned Wikipedia, initially as a research project to serve their own needs and see if something so simple could work. Similarly, Evan Williams and Meg Hourihan created the Blogger weblog authoring tool for their own project communication while building a project management system. In both cases, the traditional project they were working on failed and the research project was put out into the world to become a phenomenal success.

Weblogs have since their inception been advanced in a decentralized fashion by users as developers, based on open standards and

accessibility of contribution. Simple scripting languages and accessible developer communities lowered the barrier to contribution by code.

Wikis provide users the ability to participate in horizontal information assembly, just as developers participate in vertical information assembly. As a tool, it has the greatest promise to turn citizens into hackers, blur the line between users and developers and allow everyone to participate in the open source movement.

Similarly, low cost audio and video production tools like Apple's GarageBand and iMovie turn users into developers. In all sectors of information goods, this provides opportunities for organizations to re-align the value chain. Moveon.org's user contributed political ads, selected through an emergent process, is a perfect example of what's to come. Your users want to help you, help each other.

## **Hypothetical Citizen Initiative: Public Record**

Public Record is a hypothetical independent self-organizing resource for voters that tracks the issues and influencers of the 2004 presidential campaign. Accountability and trust in the democratic process is at an all time low, which weakens our civil society and democratic institutions. An opportunity exists to provide a resource for citizens, by citizens to strengthen our civil institutions.

Primarily based upon wiki, Public Record allows any citizen to contribute to construction of a website at any time, a tool that fosters trust by giving up control. Augmenting the wiki with weblogs allows healthy debate on issues and content to occur without degrading the content itself—in a publish/subscribe format that does not overload participants. Wikis allow a larger portion of the citizenry to participate in the open source movement by allowing contributions through horizontal information assembly (in contrast to vertical information assembly only available to programmers).

Wikipedia has demonstrated that collaborative editing can be constructive at scale and low cost—pointing to a potential solution of developing a public record of accountability. An encyclopedia is a political artifact, as definition is fraught with controversy.

Public Record would be a collaboratively edited public record of accountability for the candidates and the media. Key elements include:

- Individual or organization Record Pages that build a record based on fact of what was said and done;
- Issue pages that cross-index Record Pages ;
- Blog discussion;

- Leverage link analysis of blog discussion to reveal what may be of more interest to readers and administrators;
- An administrators' edit-only homepage that provides key indexes and navigation;
- A core group of volunteers to maintain the wiki in its early days until users defend it themselves.

Unlike Wikipedia, which uses mailing lists and encourages discussion on separate wiki pages, a Socialtext approach would be to use its integrated weblog capability plus integration with existing blogspace primarily through Trackback for input, which lists other sites linking to a posting, and RSS, a syndication technology, for output to facilitate discussion about the content of the site. A single group blog aggregates all discussion—recent changes within blog posts—and blogs per content page.

## **Hypothetical Government Initiative: Public Comment**

The government started listening back in 1997 when Kevin Werbach set up a an email inbox for public comment at the Federal Communications Commission<sup>13</sup>: “Right now commenting is a fairly arduous, archaic process,” said Werbach, the FCC's counsel for new technology policy. “Remarks have to be submitted on paper, in multiple copies. So we're simplifying with a Web page form that will include a searchable database...It's a question of whether we have the manpower to deal with compiling and summarizing so many comments.

Therein lays the problem and the opportunity. On the one hand, every public comment needs to go on record and should be read. On the other, they are public comments, so the public can interact with them.

Public Comments could be submitted in weblog form, with each commenter getting their own blog which could be publicly anonymous or not. Comments may be direct comments or commenting upon comments by linking to them. Ideally, staffers themselves engage in external blogging to ask questions and highlight issues. A link rank measure of links within a span of time, points citizens making comments and staffers towards what may be of greater interest or value. For example, a group may post a deliberated comment and have supporters link to it in support, a form similar to a digital petition. Links themselves take advantage of the “Vote

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,2956,00.html>

Links”<sup>14</sup> standard to allow people to provide comments and control how it effects the link rank. A Vote Link allows the blogger to tag if they agree, abstain or disagree with what they are linking to. Leveraging Vote Link metadata, those making comments would be presented with blogs that have voted along side them as a cue for group formation.

Staffers do more than carry the burden of compiling and summarizing comments, they synthesize information to inform decisions. Staffers are encourage to track persistent issues in wiki and hold internal conversations by blog. A similar link rank is used, adjusted for scale of participation, and each wiki page represents the group voice of staffers within their social network.

## Emergent Pluralism

Joi Ito suggests there is a new pattern of emergent democracy being enabled through new tools such as weblogs. He suggests that as these tools evolve they could support a higher-level order through their emergent properties to result in a model closer to direct democracy.

To put it another way, these tools may support a new form of democratic pluralism. Pluralism is government carried out by a process of bargaining and compromise between a variety of competing leadership groups. There are two kinds of pluralism in American government today:

- **Institutionalized pluralism** “depicts a society whose members are bound together by calculated fealty to a network of proto-coalitions and a dense normative system for which bargaining is the prescribed behavior.”
- **Individualized pluralism** is a system “constituted of independent members who have few group or institutional loyalties and who are generally less interested in sacrificing short-run, private career goals for the longer-term benefits of bargaining.”

In *Going Public*, Michael Gecan describes how until the 1980s the United States was governed through an institutional pluralism in which political parties were the dominant mechanism of influence. President Ronald Reagan subverted this pattern by going public with issues when negotiation between his Republican party and the Democrats failed. When he went public with an issue, lobbying organizations mobilized public to pressure congressmen with a deluge of calls, faxes and letters. [This is strategy that predates the Reagan Administration, going back at least to President Franklin

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<sup>14</sup> <http://developers.technorati.com/wiki/VoteLinks>

Roosevelt's practice of appealing directly to the people for support through his "Fireside Chat" radio broadcasts.—*ed.*]

Today American politics has an unconstructive balance between institutional and individualized pluralism. Weakened parties reduce longer-term best interest decisions. Lobbying only is effective in highly organized groups on select issues that resonate for deep dedication and financial backing. And where lobbying groups do not achieve critical mass, decision makers rely short-term polling of sentiment. The majority of the U.S. doesn't participate in the party system nor special interest groups. This lack of participation results in a disenfranchised public and ineffective government of both long and short-term issues.

If simple tools could decrease the cost of organization as well as enable a transactional norm between organizations, a new form of pluralism could arise. Emergent pluralism depicts a society whose members who have institutional loyalties to easily formed issue groups that have direct interaction their elected representatives and the media.

While direct democracy is on the rise with increasing use of referendums and experiments at the local level, representative democracy is an institution worth defending. Without it, minority constituencies, complex issues and longer term considerations would not be represented. Its not that the masses are asses – responsible representation is effective when decisions are well informed, free of conflict of interest and held accountable.

Emergent pluralism is not direct democracy, it instead seeks to augment the capabilities of decision makers to serve their constituency. Just as representative democracy holds that representatives can carry the burden of governance so citizens can specialize in other fields, Emergent Pluralism needs to support this structure without creating undue burdens for decision makers. In other words, it is impossible for representatives to have direct interaction with every constituent.

The early days of interaction between citizen bloggers and the media have demonstrated the capability to enhance the capabilities of the media. Stories originated, sustained (e.g. the saga of Senator Trent Lott's comments about Senator Strom Thurmond, which led to his resignation as U.S. Senate Majority Leader), freshly sourced, framed beyond the episode or fact checked by blog result in better media coverage. This is done without creating undue burdens upon journalists to interact with readers. Part of this dynamic is complementary, part of it is competitive – but the two forms of journalism make each other better.

The experiences of the Dean Campaign and Moveon.org point to the promise and challenges for decision makers to gain new listening

capabilities. The Dean Campaign took the revolutionary step of opening up comments for blog posts. This provided equal access for citizens to voice their views, some of which were brought to the campaign leadership's attention through the judgment of staffers. As comment volume increased, they lost their utility for reading and listening, requiring every contribution be read to determine its relevancy. Moveon.org used forums for feedback and instituted a rating system that Wes Boyd described as a key facet of how they listened to key constituents. The problem with rating systems is they lose potential participation and written context. A key design challenge remains—how to give everyone an equal voice to provide a sense of participation while filtering important contributions to decision makers? Perhaps the Clark Community Network established by the Wesley Clark 2004 presidential campaign, or the hypothetical civic projects described in this essay provide such a model that empowers people to create their own weblogs, encourages post-to-post conversation and leveraging of index tools like Technorati to reveal ideas that are gaining traction.

One thing the Dean Campaign demonstrated, without question, is the capability for flash fundraising when supported by the right conversational networks. The potential exists to couple this fundraising capability for new groups to gain representation through lobbying. Groups that leverage memetics, the study of how ideas spread and affect society, in blogspace for recruiting critical mass, connecting with other groups, deliberate positions and raise funds to engage decision makers will be most successful. In fact, this has already started to happen with lobbyists for hire organization such as LobbySmith.com, although it has yet to be coupled with conversation networks. Emergent pluralism will only work when citizens learn to connect with decision makers.

## **Social Networks and Influence**

It is precisely the connection with the real world that calls into question our virtual advances. The Dean Campaign's rise and fall will be discussed at length but whether it was a victim of broadcast politics is beside the point. The reason the tech industry and Silicon Valley have been a success is because it developed a culture that rewarded and learned from failure. Blog Campaign version 1.0 will be very different when it appears as Version 2.0 in 2006 or 2008.

Speaking at the O'Reilly Digital Democracy Teach-in, former Dean campaign manager Joe Trippi highlighted the tension between the transparent nature of Internet campaigns and the traditional model of broadcast politics. He remarked that not only could competitors mimic tactics, but he lacked a backchannel to communicate with ardent supporters when it was a holy shit moment without alerting

the media. This tension is similar to Individualized Pluralism and Institutionalized Pluralism. Aside from distributed organization, much of the campaign's communication and fundraising strategy was very similar to how special interest groups leverage individualized pluralism by going public with issues. It did so in a way that it lost the ability to privately coordinate and negotiate with decision makers (e.g. regional and local organizers). Further application of emergent social software as a private backchannel could have allowed Trippi to communicate as well as process feedback with the campaign as an institution.

The structure of a distributed campaign that fosters self-organization and social networking at the edge still holds promise. Not just because it cost-effectively engages activist support but because people make decisions in a social context. The work of Paul Beck shows that social networks played a critical role in encouraging political defection for the Perot Campaign in 1992<sup>15</sup>. Dina Mayzlin shows that targeting social networks can be an effective strategy of influence in product purchase decisions.<sup>16</sup> When both mass advertising and social networking is employed, social networks exhibit greater influence. However, broadcast is alone more effective when directly compared with a social networking strategy. Perhaps when the media turned against Dean, he lost the leverage of social networks, and competitive broadcast strategies won. But encouraging open deliberation and networking in physical and virtual Meetups will be a co-opted strategy for campaigns to come.

## Participatory Politics

Participatory politics is a disruptive movement. Leveraging social software and the role of social networking, it provides citizens a role more than every four years. The level of engagement it can provide with candidates, issues and institutions strikes at the heart of the sources of citizen disenfranchisement. Social capital, voter apathy and distrust in political institutions are all issues that connectedness can address. If you are reading this book, you have an interest in tools for change. Even if you are not making them, by using them in your own way your very actions have constructive consequence. Its time to put the demos back in democracy. One link at a time.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu/faculty/pbeck/encouragingdefection.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.som.yale.edu/faculty/dm324/papers.asp>