Social Software for Social Change

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

We may look back on the next ten years as a huge opportunity to create a new generation of civic organisations and campaigns based on the way the "social web" – social networking and the related tools known as Web 2.0 – allows people to find new ways to organise themselves at scale.

A resurgence of civic activism based on social networking could breathe new life into our flagging public domain and formal politics.

The tools of Web 2.0 – hereafter the "social web" – do four main things.

First, they allow many more people to participate in debate. Tools to create, publish and distribute content – video, pictures, music, text - through blogs and websites are now readily available and within reach of the average computer user.

Second, social software allows people with like interests to find one another and connect much more easily, through social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo.

Third, under some circumstances, people can now collaborate and coordinate their activities at scale, without requiring much of the top down hierarchy of large organisations.

Fourth, as a result large scale collaborations can create quite reliable, robust and complex products ranging from open source computer programmes such as Linux, massively multi player games such as World of Warcrafts and compendiums of knowledge such as Wikipedia, the free online encyclopaedia.

The rubric of the social web is: contribute, connect, collaborate, create.

The social web should be good for democracy giving more people more of a voice in debates, widening the range of issues debated and making it easier for them to come together in campaigns. Those in power will face more scrutiny and will be more likely

to be held to account. The social web should be good for campaigning to bring pressure to bear on those in power and to change public opinion. The social web dramatically cuts the costs of publicising and mobilising people in campaigns.

But if the social web does revive the public domain, it will do so only by unsettling it. That is because the incumbent players of the public domain – political parties and traditional civic organisations - are themselves creatures of the industrial media era – broadcast, print, newspapers. Political parties and third sector organisations rely on information and media to inform and mobilise supporters and to make their case to the public. They are used to communicating by broadcasting, marketing messages to members, from one to many. Most are ill-equipped to take advantage of the potential of the 'social web' which relies on peer-to-peer communications and more lateral, dispersed forms of organisation.

Political parties and traditional third sector organisations are starting to adapt to these changes. But they are likely to find themselves competing and collaborating with entirely new kinds of campaigns and social activism that emerge from the social web. Adaptation to, collaboration with and competition from new entrants will be needed to exploit the social potential of these technologies to the full.

People care about causes not primarily about the organisations that represent them. It used to be that a narrow set of often charity based third sector organisations were identified with particular causes from poverty relief to animal protection. Potentially the social web will create more ways for people to engage with causes by passing established voluntary sector organisations. One possibility will be time limited, global and collaborative campaigns that are beyond the reach of primarily national voluntary sector organisations. Another will be much more specific, niche campaigns that might focus on a particular locality or group, that are too small for a large NGO to focus upon. In *The Long Tail* Chris Anderson argues that there will be many more markets in future for products with a small but loyal following: millions of products will find niche markets with just a few consumers and only a few products will find mass markets with many millions of consumers. Something similar may well happen to the voluntary sector, with a growing long tail of social causes.

So for the causes espoused by the third sector this might be a time of unprecedented opportunity, a flowering a social activism. But for established third sector organisations it may be profoundly unsettling, (just as it is for incumbents in other information and media intensive sectors such as magazines, television and newspapers.)

The same is true of politics itself. Politics used to be identified with parties, elections and parliaments. People still care about political issues but less and less about formal politics and parties. The social web may revive public democratic debate but only serve to further marginalise traditional political parties if they cannot adapt.

The technology commentator Tim O'Reilly argues the social web depends on "architectures of participation" that make it easy for people to take part, contribute, collaborate and create together. For social activism the key will be whether political parties and third sector organisations can create similar architectures of participation for campaigning to make it easy for people to voice their views, link up with others and take action together.

There is n doubt the potential is huge. But so is the challenge to many voluntary organisations that are forty years old or more. Put it this way. A computer game with 1m players only needs 1% of them to devote time as player-developers – creating content that is given back to the game – to have a developer workforce of 10,000. Apply the same logic to the voluntary sector. Amnesty International has 1.8m members. If Amnesty persuaded 1% of its members – 18,000 people – to contribute three days voluntary labour a year, that would be 54,000 days, or the equivalent of 240 extra full time staff.

2. The Public Domain

The public domain is in a state of flux. Older forms of political engagement and campaigning are degenerating; new and energetic forms are emerging.

Citizens seem increasingly uninterested by formal politics. Two centuries ago the disenfranchised majority clamoured to be given access to the political process. Now they are leaving in droves. In the 2001 and 2005 General Elections four out of ten people chose not to vote, rising to six out of ten among 18-25 year olds. The 1997 election recorded the lowest post-war turnout. Membership of the main political parties is now less than a quarter of its level in 1964. Less than 1% of the electorate say they campaign for a political party. Members of political parties make up less than 2% of the voting population. A more individualistic, consumerist culture has eroded the collective identities that mass political parties were based upon. Politics itself has become less ideological, more personality driven and less exciting. The institutions of government seem simultaneously more distant from and insensitive to the intimacy of people's lives and yet less able to protect them from global forces. People talk of their political representatives as invisible, distant, alien, partisan, arrogant, untrustworthy, irrelevant and disconnected. Politics is in danger of becoming an empty husk.

Yet participation in the public realm of debate and campaigning is not simply declining. It is also taking on new forms. The ESRC's Citizen's Audit found that three-quarters of the public engaged in some form of civic political action in the course of a year, and a third engaged in more than five. The Audit found that people's political concerns were as intense as they ever were. Consumerist movements, such as Fair Trade products, have grown massively in the past two decades, as have campaigns that often misleadingly referred to as single issue. One is the growth of environmental campaigns. Membership of Friends of the Earth rose from just over 1,000 in 1971 to more than 119,000 in 2002. Greenpeace went from 30,000 members in 1981 to 221,000 in 2002. The growth of these campaigns may reflect a preference people have for single issue campaigns that are more focussed than the catch all politics of parties. However that is only part of the story. Campaigns that have grown tend to: appeal to people's sense of identity as consumers as well as citizens; give them something concrete to do; give them as sense of belonging, by associating them

with people of like values and provide an alternative way to see how the world should be organised. Political parties described environmental campaigns as single issue; those involved often see them as offered an alternative economic and social system.

As the formal political realm continues to empty of people, passion and ideas so social campaigning and civic activism has become much more attractive, especially for younger people. The challenge for politics and politicians is like that in any industry facing decline: how to acquire, collaborate with or become more like the rising new entrants. For many the implication is clear: political parties and processes need to model themselves and rely more on the social sector.

3. New Media, New Democracy

Television and mass media have provided the information backbone to our public life: that is where issues are debated, politicians and others appeal for our attention and votes. These industrial era media, particularly newspapers and television, have high fixed costs – print plants and television studios – that create high barriers to entry and depend on reaching large mass markets to earn their keep. As a result industrial era media suffers from a number of significant drawbacks as a tool for democratic debate.

Free speech is essential to any democracy. As political theorist Gerry Cohen points out democracy is based on popular sovereignty which demands free and open discussion among citizens. Restricting speech creates inequalities between those whose speech is allowed and those whose speech is restricted. Those restrictions also impede the free flow of information not just reducing the range of views represented but also eroding the quality of democratic discussion and decision by providing it with less information to work with.

Industrial era media concentrates ownership and so can give undue weight to the views of a few proprietors. News editors can decide which views and voices are to be heard or when a story is important so an issue gets put on the national agenda or when on the contrary it drops off the agenda or never even makes it. Social capital theorist Robert Putnam blames the passivity of television in large part for the decline in social engagement and civic participation. It turns citizens into an audience to be targetted for well-honed messages rather than people who can – and even have a responsibility – to engage in debate and efforts to change society. The high fixed costs of industrial era media create a need to reach large audiences with glossy political commercials that require large sums of money to produce. That in turn creates openings for corruption in party funding as parties turn to wealthy donors to fund their mass market media strategies. That creates a risk that policy becomes tailored to the needs of rich donors. The number of people who can have a voice, raise an issue, join in a debate is restricted by the number of pages in a newspaper, limited airtime and scarce spectrum. No wonder that many people are turning away from a realm of debate that offers them so few opportunities to voice their views and be heard.

In contrast the social web, in theory at least, offers substantial advantages as an alternative backbone for a different kind of democratic debate. The social web could provide a true commons for debate in which ideas and information could be shared among a much larger number of people. Anyone with a laptop and a broadband connection can become a commentator on current events, publish and distribute their views. Sites such as Digg – a blog-news aggregator - and tools such as Technorati and del.ici.ous allow people to aggregate, rate, rank, find and share information created by bloggers. Anyone armed with a camera phone can become a citizen reporter.

As a result the powerful can be held to account more easily because there are more eyes and ears watching what they are doing. Abuses of power should be harder to get away with. In the US an incident recorded with a camera phone – a security guard assaulting an Iranian born student – became a national issue. US bloggers have shown they can pursue and even reignite stories that the mainstream media have dropped, such as Trent Lott's racist remarks or John Kerry's about military personnel serving in Iraq.

Beyond that the social web should promote basic democratic values such as self-organisation, free association and self-regulation. Howard Dean's failed grassroots bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 highlighted the possibilities for grassroots fundraising which organisations such as Moveon.org among others has continued to exploit. Barack Obama one the current crop of Democratic presidential hopefuls has a supporter network of 62,000 on Facebook the social networking site. This network formed without his approval, instigation or funding. By March 2007 it already had a staff of five. The social web should give grassroots funding and political initiative a shot in the arm.

When online social networking, campaigning citizen journalism, grassroots organisation and fundraising combine, they could change for the better the way democracy works, by encouraging more people to become participants in public debate and campaigns, shaping decisions about the future of their society.

But there are two different ways in which this might happen: deliberation and mobilisation.

Deliberation

Many apostles of e-democracy imagine it will create a world in the image of the theories of German political philosopher Jurgen Habermas who since the 1980s has argued that free undistorted communication would create the context for a political revolution. In a "perfect speech situation" Habermas argued there would be open, rational, dialogue and debate. Anyone would be able to raise a topic for conversation, join in and question the rules for conducting the conversation. Democracy would be a perpetual conversation, Habermas argued, which would encourage more thoughtful dialogue and debate. Indeed some experiments in e democracy approximate to Habermas's vision. A report on Minnesota's well developed E-Democracy programme claimed it managed to "stimulate reflexivity, foster respectful listening and participant commitment to ongoing dialogue, achieve open and honest exchange, provide equal opportunity for all voices to be heard and maximise autonomy from state and corporate interests." (Dahlberg 2001) Political theorists interested in the web's democratic potential have generally followed Habermas's high minded hopes. Hale et al in 1999 argued the web could bring "more thoughtful, civic minded and deliberative patterns of communication." (Hale, Musso and Weare, 1999) Coleman and Gotze argued it could "improve the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion." (Coleman and Gotze, 2001) Witschge brings together the arguments of many proponents of deliberative democracy to suggest that online deliberation should provide "quality of participation, discursive equality and following from this diversity of viewpoints and arguments." (Witschge, 2004.) In the UK context Geoff Mulgan has argued that there should be more innovation in hosting deliberative conversations "even though it remains unclear which forms work best in terms of delivering good decisions and making people feel engaged. There will also be competition between governments, parties, the media and NGOs as to who is best place to hold such conversations." (Post Party Politics: Can Participation Reconnect People and Government? Involve 2006)

Stephen Coleman, Cisco Professor of E-Democracy at the Oxford Internet Institute argues that : "The challenge for contemporary democracy is not to create new technologies for delivering and new audiences for receiving online spin but to

develop engaging ways for citizens to connect, interact and make a difference. I call this DIY politics." (Spinning the Web, Hansard Society, 2005.)

Some of social web's best known products – Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia created in large part by volunteers, Linux, the open source software programme and Slashdot, the geek discussion site which gets 3m visits a day - seem to bear this out. All depend on an ethic of responsible self-governance and open debate, in which decision making is open to account. The challenge for the third sector will be to adapt these models of mass self governance and collaboration to engage more people in deliberative conversations on policy issues, not just in response to government policy but independently. The Stern review was commissioned by government. A citizen's deliberation on climate change policy could be organised online by Greenpeace. A challenge for government is whether it will recognise that it should not attempt to host all these conversations and turn them into consultations on its policy. Democracy will be strengthened only if there is more deliberation independent of government.

So one critical question for government is what it should – and should not do – to make good the social web's potential for strengthening deliberative democracy.

Campaigning

Yet improved deliberation is only one way in which democracy might be improved by the social web. The reality is that online political debate is often more raucous than face-to-face debates, in part because most of it happens anonymously. Online forums are often more like speakers corner on steroids than a thoughtful seminar. They are good places for fierce argument and often for equally strong agreement among people of like mind. They are not so often places for shared, reflexive deliberation.

Indeed the social web might best strengthen democracy by revitalising campaigning, to make it easier for people with a cause to mobilise people to action to exert their power. Social networks on the web tend to draw together people of like mind. That is not good necessarily for free and open debate but it is good for creating campaigns. The web as a tool for deliberative democracy depends on drawing together people with differing views. The web as a tool for campaigning builds on its tendency to draw together people who share the same views.

As *Good Campaigning* a report by the Young Foundation puts it : "civil society campaigns play a vital and irreplaceable role in building the good society." As Geoff Mulgan argues in *Good and Bad Power* : "The history of democracy…is bound up with the histories of social protest and moral persuasion in which social movements have claimed to better represent the interests and spirit of the people than their supposed representatives." Democratic advances have rarely come from reasoned deliberation and certainly not from deliberation alone. More often they have come through the mobilisation of many people in protest to force those in power to change tack, often involving a measure of conflict.

The social web makes it easier for people to connect with other people of like mind to sign petitions, attend rallies, donate money. The main opportunity the social web presents is not to make it easier to debate issues but to mobilise people around an cause on which they have already made up their mind, that seals should not be killed, small arms banned, drugs legalised.

Social network based campaigning should particularly appeal to a younger generation who are the main users of these sites and services, who are also the most disconnected from mainstream politics. If social network style campaigning gives young people more of sense of connection with one another, more opportunities to take part in a way they want (not necessarily handing out leaflets or attending meetings) and faster feedback about the impact of their actions, then it could be particularly important for the future of democracy by re-engaging young people.

Even when campaigns do not pay off they have wider social benefits. As Martin Vogel of BBC Action Network puts it people engaged in campaigns: "start to make connections with other people in their community, when previously they didn't even know their neighbours. They work together and build the capabilities of their community to deal with issues. So even if they don't win the campaign at hand they're better able to respond the next time a challenge arises. In short people who take action end up feeling better about their lives and where they live." The more the social web allows people to join together in campaigns, ultra local as well as global, the more they should engage socially and with their communities.

The social web will improve democracy if it becomes a tool for mobilisation, especially for those with little access to the mainstream media and its audiences. Mobilisation, not deliberation, should be the goal. Once again however that will pose a dilemma for government: what should it do – and refrain from doing – to promote the independent capacity of civic organisations to develop new tools for campaigning?

The sweet spot

These two ways to revitalise democracy – deliberation and mobilisation - are not incompatible. Social campaigns can put an issue on the public agenda and so create an environment for a more considered policy debate. Campaigns create the space in which deliberation takes place. Deliberation – the Stern review on climate change – can create the evidence and intellectual consensus to mobilise social change. The civic sector and government will search for ways in which deliberation and mobilisation work together, learning from the success and failures of the Make Poverty History campaign, in which mass mobilisation created the setting in which a G8 summit deliberated on the future of Africa.

However nor are these two approaches necessarily complementary. Government and large corporations are often keen on more deliberative and consultative approaches in an effort to win consensus for their policies, divert energy away from campaigns and make their strategies more legitimate by working with third sector organisations. (Witness the recent campaign by Chevron to engage consumers in a debate about climate change.) Many third sector organisations complain the government is already engulfing the sector with consultation exercises that sap resources and energy without securing any influence over policy.

Deliberation and Campaigning, Government and Civil Sector

One way of understanding how government and the civic sector might use the social web to promote more deliberative democracy and more social campaigning is set out in the accompanying grid.

	From Government	In Between	From Civil Sector
Deliberation	Government uses online tools and forums to engage citizens in policy development, increasingly to draw in younger people. E.g. the environmental contract wiki, online planning debates	Government commissions the third sector to host conversations about shared policy issues, e,g diabetes dialogue. Third sector persuades government to engage with a consultation /policy dialogue it has launched	Third sector hosts conversations independently of government, e.g. US energy plan drawn up by participants in Daily Kos, open strategy tools for online multi stakeholder policy development
Usage Prognosis	Some already being used More likely to come .	Limited usage More likely but third sector concerns about cooption	Very limited, complex undertaking but more experiments underway
Campaigning	Government uses social networking as a direct channel of communication and mobilisation: e.g. neighbourhood watch, peer support for social care, health and education.	Government works with third sector to launch campaigns which change the context for policy deliberation: e.g. Make Poverty History, heart disease campaigns Social networking allows that mobilisation to happen more quickly and reach more people .	Civil society uses social networking and other online and mobile tools to create their own campaigns to change government policy and public opinion: e.g. fuel protests, Greenpeace Ocean Defenders
Usage Prognosis	Limited Limited because government will be too clumsy	Limited Huge potential following apparent success of MPH and Jamie's School Dinners	Growing Rapid growth ranging from controlled third sector campaigns to populist mass mobilisations

Issues

The social web could weaken democracy as well as strengthening it. It could feed more populism. The civic sector should be well placed to address these issues. Three issues stand out:

As US political theorist Theda Skocpol puts it : more voices do not automatically mean more democratic capacity. Freedom of speech does not guarantee an audience: there is no guarantee that anyone in power is listening. The cacophony of media by the masses will disorganise, disaggregate and disable the public sphere of democratic debate as much as revitalising it. One critical role for the civic sector will be to act as independent, trusted, aggregators and guides to important online debates and voices and so attract audiences to them.

Social networks and nice markets allow people to live in their own little worlds, choosing to network and debate only with people who share their views. More people will live in an echo chamber: they hear from others a confirmation of what they already think. Instead of more challenge and debate there will be more feverish agreement and entrenched prejudice. Democratic debate only thrives when people can take independent and different positions. People with differing views might find themselves even further apart, less in contact. Social networking might be a recipe for growing conformity – group think – in the way people think. As critic Jerol Lanier puts it : Digital Maoism. One critical role for third sector organisations should be as integrators to provide spaces where different points of view can be aired.

As media markets fragment in part due to the distractions of blogging, social networks and citizen journalism, the mainstream media may have to become ever more populist to retain the large audiences they need to fund their high cost business models. That may make it more difficult to fund good journalism and rigorous analysis. A critical role for the third sector will be to uphold standards of quality in public debate, to self regulate as public interest media producers.

The capacity to access and participate in the gilded world of collaborative creativity is unequally distributed. It requires time and money. The egalitarianism of cyberspace is

an illusion. Worse social networking may simply entrench existing inequalities as people with computers, connections, time and money, make more connections with other people like them. Those already rich in knowledge, information and connections may just get richer and more influential. A critical role for the third sector should be to give voice to those who will still be without a voice, even in a world where the means of media production are highly distributed.

3. Practice

How well placed is the third sector to take up the democratic and campaigning potential of the social web and address the problems it might cause?

Below we distinguish three different types of innovation taking place in the third sector's use of the Internet:

- sustaining innovations in which third sector use the social web to do traditional campaigning tasks more effectively;
- disruptive innovation which create new models for the third sector to organise itself;
- hybrids, in which established organisations create a new mix of traditional and new methods of working.

A second distinction is the kind of participation that the social web might encourage. Henry Jenkins, the MIT new media analysts, distinguishes between participants as hackers and fans.

Fans participate in something created by an organisation or brand: fans of Star Trek participate in something created by Lucas Films; fans of Apple participate in the company's brand and products. Fans generally want to participate as part of something that is already organised and may well be part of the mainstream.

Hackers, on the contrary, like more self governance, they want to participate in creating something that does not rely on a larger organisation. Wikipedia, Linux, Oh My News and other open source style projects are examples.

In general sustaining innovations in the use of the social web by third sector organisations (and government) are encouraging more people to participate as "fans. The more disruptive, riskier but more fruitful innovations are being created by hackers outside the mainstream.

3.1 Sustaining Innovations

The repertoire of campaigning tools available to the third sector have not changed that much since the 19th century: marches, petitions, street protests, publicity. The social web provides third sector organisations with a new way to organise these activities. Thus we already see and will see more of:

- Online petitions, such as Jamie Oliver's Feed Me Better. Sending an email at a click of a button is easier than posting a letter.

- Recruiting, connecting and keeping in touch with members through social networks. Examples include Oxfam's "I'm In campaign" which recruited members through texting. The Genocide Intervention Network in the US grew through social networking on Facebook and MySpace.

- Raising funds through targeting marketing and fundraising initiatives, using email lists.

- Advocacy to mobilise support, for example by using the web to give voice to stories and accounts from people affected, such as the personal histories of people with paralysis on the Bridges2Hope site or the way Global Voices has expanded the range of blogs from Africa that can be easily accessed.

- Allowing smaller civic organisations to gain scale by coordinating their efforts, through shared sites and portals. Examples include the Shared Earth cooperation between hundreds of smaller environmental and wildlife NGOs in Washington State and the International Action Network for Small Arms which brings together a host of organisations campaigning against the small arms trade.

- Allowing large scale collaborations and coalitions of third sector organisations to emerge, with time limited goals. Prime examples include the Jubilee 2000 campaign and Make Poverty History.

In most cases incumbent third sector organisations are quite sensibly using the web to allow them to do their existing jobs more effectively. However incumbents are rarely good at exploiting the disruptive potential of new technologies. On the contrary that often comes from low cost, new entrants, that initially operate in the margins.

3.2 Disruptive Innovations

The social web might help to sustain existing third sector organisations, but it will also create new challengers to them. Third sector organisations are often intermediaries between people who need help and those with the resources and the power to help them. One criticism of third sector organisations is that their bureaucracy and administration costs sometimes take too much away from directly helping people in need. It is common for organisations to see their own survival and health as a proxy for the cause or end they serve.

The social web has already shown in media, entertainment, software and information that it has the potential to create low cost ways for many people to participate and collaborate in forming new organisations. One obvious disruptive innovation in the third sector is for new kinds of civic activism to emerge outside the established third sector and as an alternative to it.

Most people are interested in causes not in the organisations that seek to represent them. In future there will be more ways for people to participate in these causes. The social web may prove to be good for social causes but unsettling for social sector organisations.

What kinds of disruptive innovations have we seen and what might be coming? Below we focus on six examples of ways that the social web could disrupt the social sector.

(i) New quasi political parties

The traditional distinction between political parties, with an overarching ideology, and single issue campaigns may be breaking down as new catchall movements, mainly organised online, reach out to encompass many issues. These new online catch

call movements are not the same as political parties but nor are they single issue campaigns.

A prime example is the Move.on network in the US which was born when two internet entrepreneurs circulated a petition against Republican efforts to impeach President Clinton, calling on Congress to instead "move on" to address other more pressing issues facing the country. Within a week 100,000 people had signed the online petition. Co-founder Joan Blades said: "We thought it was going to be a flash campaign, that we would help everyone to connect with leadership in all the ways we could figure out and then get back to our regular lives. A half a million people ultimately signed and we somehow never got back."

Starting from that single issue MoveOn began to work with its supporters to campaign on a wider range of civic and progressive issues. Following the 9/11 attacks, a student Eli Pariser created a petition for a restrained, multilateral response which drew more than half a million signatures. Shortly afterwards Pariser joined forces with MoveOn.

As of early 2007 MoveOn had more than 3.3m members across the US, with more than 268,000 active volunteers, 700,000 individual donors and just 15 staff. The movement's civic action has blossomed far beyond being a single issue campaign to support an eclectic mix of issues from campaign finance reform to environmental protection to social security. It helped to block efforts to remove federal funding from National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service. But it as done far more than just lobby. MoveOn is not just a pressure group. For example it organised the hosting of more than 30,000 evacuees after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. MoveOn has developed a well tried approach to sending mobilising emails linked to current events, mobilising people to donate money or take action. The funds have helped to buy advertisements in print and broadcast media which generated a wider audience and then a further wave of emails and social networking connections. MoveOn's political action committee, now directed by Pariser, pioneered the raising of small donations online in 2000. MoveOn raised $32m for progressive election candidates in 2004 and in the 2006 congressional elections MoveOn volunteers working through a distributed phone bank system coordinated by email made 7m phone calls, hosted 7,500 house parties and ran 6,000 events in target districts.

MoveOn is not a single issue campaign, a political party, a pressure group or a flash mob. It is a sustained campaigning networked that can swing from raising money for favoured candidates, to directly putting pressure on politicians, to taking direct action to supporting people in need. Move.on has spawned a similar effort in Australia, called Get.up and more recently a global peace campaign Avaaz which is based in the UK. As yet, however, Britain has no equivalent.

(ii) Mobile Politics

The idea of the social web should extend from the Internet to include mobile phones, especially as mobile phones become more multifunctional and internet enabled. By 2012 the wireless internet will encompass both computers and mobile phones. This matters because mobile phones are diffusing around the world more quickly than any previous technology, especially in the fast developing world of Asia but also amongst poorer and younger parts of the population of developed economies such as recent immigrants.

In 1991 the ratio of mobile to mainline telephones in the world was 1:34 but by 1995 it was 1:8. By 2003 mobile phone subscriptions had overtaken mainline subscriptions for the first time: 1,748m mobile lines in 2004, compared with 1,198m mainlines. Of 182 countries in 2004 only 31 had mobile penetration rates of more than 80%, more than half had rates of less than 20 per cent. The number of phone lines per 100 inhabitants globally was 27.75 in 2004, compared with 19.04 for fixed lines. One way of reading this is that the potential for mobile growth remains huge.

Penetration rates vary widely around the world from 89% in Singapore to just 4% in India, from 62% in Chile to 0.7% in Cuba, 88% in Bahrain to 13% in Syria. Although the mobile phone is barely established in some countries in Africa – penetration in Burundi is just 1% - the potential is huge. In January 2004 52m Africans had mobile phones while just 5.8m used email.

China is the world's fastest growing mobile market, adding 60m subscribers as year, the size of the entire UK market. In 2003 more than 220bn text messages were sent in China. Developing economies with high levels of mobile penetration, such as the

Philippines, are proving to be some of the most innovative. The average Filippino mobile phone user sends 2,000 text messages a year. The country's 30m mobile users send 200m messages a day.

The US is indisputably the centre for innovation in computer based Web2.0, but not as far as mobile goes, as yet. As of late 2004 only 27m US cell phone subscribers used text.

The rapid spread of mobile communications around the world has created new political possibilities, what Manuel Castells et al call "independent channels of autonomous communication person to person." SMS messaging in particular allows for high volumes of highly personalised, peer to peer communication, through tightly knit social networks. This combination of tight social networks and rapid diffusion of messages has huge political potential which is just starting to be exploited. Several studies have shown that people get involved in political causes – for example the Freedom Rider civil rights activists in the US in the 1960s - in large part because their friends do. A technology that can mobilise friendship networks for political ends is potentially very powerful.

One of the first examples of that potential came in the Philippines in January 2001 with People Power II, a popular movement of four days of protests in Manila involving thousands of mobile phone touting demonstrators. People Power II started on January 16th when a committee of senators refused by a single vote to move against the sitting President Estrada who was facing corruption charges. It ended four days later with his removal. Debate, rumour and gossip about Estrada's corruption had started to accumulate from 1998 in a series of online forums and chat rooms. By 2001 there were about 200 websites devoted to the subject and more than 100 email discussion groups. One E-Lagda.com collected a petition with 91,000 signatures demanding Estrada's resignation. That online deliberation provided the backdrop for an extraordinary mobilisation in which thousands of people took to the streets. People Power II showed how mobile phones could be used to mobilise large numbers of people to undertake a specific action at a specific time and place. In those four days Filippino mobile users sent an average of 115m messages a day, compared with 24.7m on an average day. However in reality these mobile activists were likely to be a

minority of the population. At that stage only about 14% of the population had mobile phones.

The result of People Power II was that Gloria Arrayo, a Harvard trained economist, was sworn into office. Arrayo was herself hounded from office in 2004 in part thanks to a 17 second long mobile phone ringtone which purported to be a recording of her trying to rig the forthcoming election. The ringtone was downloaded 1m times from the website of Txtpower.org, which has not become a political force in its own right in the Philippines.

The next example of mobile phone political power came in December 2002 when South Korea elected a new president Roh Moo-Hyun, largely thanks to an online supporters' group Nosamo. Roh started experimenting with the Internet to reach young voters in 1995 when he was a regional politician. Nosamo – literally Those Who Love Roh – formed itself on June 6, 2000 as a voluntary group without the candidate's support or money. It grew slowly but by November 2001 it had 5,000 members and then it took off. By November 2002 it had 70,000 members, a force to be reckoned with. That year as the election approaches Nosamo raised $7m over the Internet in small donations. Nosamo developed an elaborate way of governing itself, using online message boards, polls and debates to shape policies which were decided by electronic voting and committee decisions taken through a chat room discussion that could be monitored by all members. A month before the election, however, Nosamo's website was closed down. Roh was lagging badly in the polls and late in the day one of his main backers withdrew his support. On the day of the election however an 11am exit poll revealed that Roh was losing by only 1-2%. Nosamo members hit the online chatrooms, message boards and mobile phones. In the course of the next hour 800,000 emails were sent to mobile phones urging people to vote. By 2pm Roh was ahead in the exit polls and went on to win. Nosamo remains a force to be reckoned with supporting and sometimes criticising the President.

Mobile politics also had a decisive impact on the Spanish elections of March 2004 which came days after the Radical Islamist terrorist bombings of three suburban trains in Madrid, killing 192 people. Soon after the bombings on Thursday, March 11 the governing party, The Partido Populaire, blamed ETA, the Basque terrorist group, an

accusation widely reported without question by the mainstream media. On Friday March 12 the government organised demonstrations of solidarity against the attacks. However by that stage allegations that the government was manipulating the bombings for its own electoral ends had already started to surface. On Saturday March 13th criticisms of the government's handling of the crisis started to spread by word of mouth. There was no central organisation. A text message urging people to congregate outside the PP offices in Madrid for a silent protest began to circulate. That day text message traffic in Spain was 20% up on an average Saturday; on the Sunday it was 40% up, an all time high. Protests spread from Madrid to Barcelona and eventually to every major Spanish city.

The message was a standard format but it was distributed very personally, from friend to friend. It was not a mail out. This combination allowed the message to spread at an exponential rate but each person got the message from someone they knew quite well, making it highly personal. An alternative text message campaign launched by the PP never took off. On March 14th the PP lost the election. The mobile campaign was not the only factor in an election dominated by the war in Iraq. The PP's attempts to "spin" the old media only fanned the flames of the protests.

Italy's June 12th and 13th regional elections underlined how difficult these new mobile politics will be for mainstream politicians. Silvio Berlusconi aware of the fate that had befallen Aznar arranged for 13m text messages to be sent to voters. People were affronted by the way their personal inboxes had been infiltrated by top down, impersonal communication. Berlusconi lost the election by a larger margin than expected.

US politics is starting to catch up. For example through the U2 Vertigo tour in 2005 Bono each night generated 10,000 mobile messages of support for the anti poverty One Campaign, asking all his audience to hold up their mobile phones in unison. In 2006 protests against proposed anti immigration legislation prompted well organised mainstream protests in major cities but also a string of smaller, flash mob protests in other cities. As one report from Houston put it: "In a matter of minutes, literally, they can get a crowd to assemble some place within half a hour, of tens of thousands of people, simply by everybody text messaging five people." One of the organisers of

the California protests remarked: "I think MySpace and cell phones player 95% in protest organising all over the state." A newspaper reported from Las Vegas : "In Las Vegas, police and school officials said at least 3,000 students, drawn together by text messages and cell phone calls left high schools, middle schools and community college after the morning bell." Candidates for the US Presidential nominations have already launched their mobile campaigns. A report for the New Politics Institute – Mobile Media in 21st Century Politics speculates on what might happed: "In the heat of the 2008 election, 1m activists, all of them connected in a collaborative web both on their PCs and their mobiles conspire in a collective act of mobile democracy, outreach to voters they know in swing states, collaborative research, a mobile meet up." If a candidate can get 1m people to donate just 10 minutes of their time that would be the same as 4,167 person weeks of work and 83 person years of work. It remains to be seen whether any of the candidates can tap this potential.

Civic groups are slowly experimenting with mobile campaigns. In 2005 Greenpeace in Buenos Aires recruited 4,500 "movil activistas" who were contacted by phone to lobby city politicians at critical moments of a debate about waste recycling strategy. In the UK the International Fund for Animal Welfare persuaded 50,000 people to join a text based petition against seal hunting. About 2% of Oxfam members now get text alerts and many have been encouraged to sign up through the "I'm In" campaign.

Successful mobile campaigns seem to share several ingredients.

- They are usually based on pre-existing social networks of friends or voluntary groups (although not always.)

- They are usually sustained by the Internet or face-to-face socialising. They are not pure mobile phenomenon.

- Mobile is often best used in a moment of crisis when speed of response is vital which is why they are so useful to complement traditional forms of street-based campaigning and protest.

- These mobilisations work best with a clear call to action, for people to do something specific at a specific time and place.

- Their success depends on the underlying political culture. For example in China the government has so far clamped down on protests orchestrated by mobile networks. In Japan, one of the most advanced mobile markets in the world, they appear to play little or no role in politics. The technology alone does not determine what kind of impact it will have on politics.

Mobile social networks are opening up new avenues for autonomous social and political mobilisation independent of mainstream political parties and voluntary organisations. Mobile phones offer a potent mix of vast reach to a large group but personalised communications. Increasingly they are also eyes and ears not just ways to distribute messages. The world's largest camera maker is now Nokia. Phones will increasingly be used to report on events and share information. In the US software such as TxtMob, MoPort and Ruckus, allows text messages to be aggregated to provide an overall picture, for example of an unfolding demonstration.

Castells et al argue that "the wide availability of individually controlled wireless communication effectively bypasses the mass-media system as a source of information and creates a new form of public space."

(iii) New forums for deliberation/collective problem solving
In late July of 2004 cinema goers across the US were treated to advertisements for *Halo 2* a science fiction video game which involves a lot of shooting. In the closing few frames of the commercial the eagle eyed could spot the address of a website – www.ilovebees.com - flickering across the screen. Over the next few days thousands of Halo fans found the site, which seemed to belong to an amateur beekeeper called Margaret and had been mysteriously taken over. Her honey-based recipes had been replaced by a list of 210 global positioning system coordinates, each specifying a precise latitude and longitude. Below each set of coordinates was a time. The times were spaced out in four minute intervals over 12 hours. A message warned that "the system was in peril" and an ominous looking clock was counting down to a date

which quick calculations showed was August 24th. At the bottom of Margaret's homepage was a single question – "what happened to this page?" – and a link to a blog written by Margaret's niece Dana who exchanged about a hundred emails with visitors before herself disappearing without explanation.

That was it. No instructions and no rules. Just a mystery to solve, a seemingly complex data set and an ominously ticking clock. Over the next four months 600,000 players – mainly college and high school students – set out to solve the mystery of what the coordinates meant. The players in *I Love Bees* did not simply gather, publish and share information. They sifted, sorted and analysed it, collectively, splitting into different teams to pursue different avenues. Eventually on the basis of that analysis they managed to create a shared theory of what the coordinates meant and so as a result what they should do. To achieve all that the players created their own websites, communication systems and ways of making decisions. The experience of *I Love Bees* is that when the conditions are right large groups of people can collaborate, in ways that were previously very hard, to define, analyse and solve tricky problems. As one player put it: "I felt we were experiencing being part of a collective intelligence. Participating in a search for or perhaps even the creation of a greater shared meaning."

The *I Love Bees* game was designed by 42 Entertainment and grew out of the phenomenon of flash mobbing, where groups of people gathered in a place, at a set time to undertake an apparently bizarre activity – like dancing in Liverpool St station – coordinated only by messages on their mobile phones. In *I Love Bees* that simple idea took on a much more complex life with a delicate balance between individual contributions and collective endeavour. Over four weeks the game designers fed out clues to the players through hundreds of websites, blogs, thousands of emails and more than 40,000 live MP3 transmissions. The clues were distributed all over the web and all over the globe. That meant players anywhere could have a role. The game's players had to find a way to share evidence with the collective and then devise a way to analyse it together. One new clue on Dana's blog, for example, attracted 2,041 comments in just a few days. A popular message board for Halo fans playing *I Love Bees* clocked 50 new posts every thirty seconds in the first few weeks. In the first ten weeks of the game players divided into different groups and made more than 1m

message board postings. One particularly well organise group of about 4,000 players known as the Beekeepers became a core group, referenced by many other players. This group produced several hundred hypotheses about what the coordinates might mean. They whittled this down to three main approaches and assigned themselves to groups to pursue these. One explored a mathematical solution to the puzzle and another the idea that the coordinates were clues to something in the vicinity that would provide the solution. The third and ultimately successful hypothesis was that the very precise coordinates referred to an exact location. Members of this group went out and took pictures of each of the 210 locations and shared the results online. Each showed a payphone.

The game came to a head from August 24th when players in their thousands turned up at the payphones armed with every conceivable piece of digital communications equipment they could muster, including databases of players' mobile phone numbers. Some players were posted online to monitor websites. At each location – a railway station, a shopping mall, the basement of a library, at the time specified a phone rang and the player answering the phone was asked a question. If they got the answer correct, which all did, they were played one of 30 snippets from a drama. The task was to put together all thirty snippets in the right order by the end of the day. That was the first of several tasks set by the game's designers over the next 12 weeks, in which the number of coordinates and payphones went from 210 to 1,000, all around the world. As the number of coordinates grew so the players created their own online maps, referencing the times and frequencies with which they were called.

The game reached a climax one Tuesday in late Autumn. Shortly after sunrise on the eastern coast of the US the game's puppet masters started calling payphones on the US east coast. Whoever answered had to provide the caller with a piece of personal information five words long. The caller revealed she would then call another of the 1,000 payphones and expect to be told the same five words. To start with the players had at least an hour to get those five words out to everyone else playing the game, anywhere in the world from Stockholm to Tokyo. The game designers planned a dozen of these relay races throughout the day. In the last race the players had just 15 seconds to get the relevant information from the person who revealed the information

to another person on the other side of the country about to take the call. The players never failed.

At one level *I Love Bees* is pretty pointless, a trivial game for students with too much time on their hands. But if games designers can get thousands of people around the world engaged in collaborating to solve a trivial puzzle then why not for defeating bird flu, tackling global warming, keeping a community safe, providing support for disaster victims, borrowing and lending money, conducting political debates, making policy decisions, teaching and learning, designing and making physical products.

The question is whether examples of collective problem solving such as *I Love Bees* are an odd exception or whether more will emerge, more consistently and robustly from a global digital culture that could emerge as the Internet and mobile communications spread around the world.

There is nothing quite like *I Love Bees* yet in the realms of politics although the policy discussion forums linked to the *Daily Kos* a forum that grew out of Howard Dean's campaign has developed a sophisticated alternative energy plan for the US and new tools such as open strategies are designed to bring together a multiple stakeholders online and offline to shape a policy.

(iv) Direction action
The social web is not juts a tool to allow people to campaign more effectively to move public opinion and put pressure on politicians to change policies. It can also be a way to mobilise resources directly to address issues without waiting for political responses. Thus Move.on did not just push for the federal government to provide more help to people left homeless in New Orleans by hurricane Katrina; it helped to organise a people finder service and found temporary homes for 30,000 people. We are likely to see more examples of this kind of direct action: pledge politics.

A prime example is the fledgling US non-profit Kiva.org, which links entrepreneurs in the developing world who need to borrow with personal lenders in the rich world. People can make small pledges – $20-$30 – with others to lend an entrepreneurs $2,000 to refurbish a shop. A quite different example is Book Crossing which aims to

turn the whole world into a library by getting people to donate books sitting on their shelves. Book Crossing marks the book which is then left in a public place for anyone to pick up. It then keeps track of the book as it circles around. As of Feb 2007 it claimed to have 3.7m books in public circulation and 534,000 members, donating and sharing resources in new ways. Shared Strength is another US organisation that allows chefs to donate their time to help cook for the homeless. The New Ork City Coalition Against Hunger has created the first proper map of the city designed for people looking for soup kitchens and free food and to help providers coordinate their efforts better. New York has 1,200 soup kitchens serving about 1m people daily. One of the most powerful examples is Witness, which operates under the mantra, "seeit, film it, change it" and puts video cameras in the hands of people facing human rights abuses so they can make their own programmes. Witness is about to launch a YouTube like hub for showing these videos.

All these are different examples of how the social web can connect people directly to resources to achieve their ends rather than just relying on campaigns and campaigners to exert pressure on politicians and policy-makers.

(v) Hacktivism

As the web itself becomes more important as a part of the public sphere so actions confined to it will become more important too. Hacktivism is the combination of civil disobedience with the technologies and techniques of computer hackers. It adds computer techniques and electronic mischief to the repertoire of semi legal and illegal political protest. Hacktivism operates in an uneasy space somewhere between online political activism, civil disobedience, cyber terrorism and computer hacking. Hacktivists believe elites exert control over a society by repressing alternative narratives of resistance and protest and what is already true of television will soon become true of the Internet unless elites are challenged directly.

One example of Hacktivism is the creation of open source software such as Six/Four and Privaterra to help human rights activists get around firewalls and blocks put in place by authoritarian regimes. Human rights software, for example, can allow people to publish material on sites outside their own country without being easily tracked by the authorities.

It's may be there will also be a growth of civil disobedience online for example through denial of service attacks on websites belonging to large organisations, virtual sit-ins, site parodies. Leading Hacktivists include Ricardo Dominques, author of the online manifesto *Digital Zapatismo* and Cult of the Dead Cow's *Hactivismo.* Most but by no means all hacktivism accords with John Rawls' definition that it is conducted openly, non-violent, conscientiously undertaken and adheres to norms of accountability.

(vi) Open source as civic activism

Sceptics doubt with good reason whether the social web will do much to reduce inequalities. About 25,000 people a day die from diseases caused by lack of clean water. Providing children with clean water and treatments for diarrohea would be a revolutionary improvement in the living standards of the poorest. Being able to share MP3 files seems rather trivial in comparison. Improving women's access to education and health would be the single most effective policy for more equitable development, not giving everyone a MySpace account. The capacity to access and participate in the gilded world of collaborative creativity is unequally distributed. It requires time and money. Worse social networking may simply further entrench existing inequalities as people with computers, connections, time and money, make more connections with other people like them.

Yet open models for sharing information, knowledge and ideas have a huge potential to be good for equality. As Yochai Benkler puts it in *The Wealth of Networks*:

"Information, knowledge and culture are core inputs into human welfare. Agricultural knowledge and biological innovation are central to food security. Medical innovation and access to its fruits are central to living a long and healthy life. Literacy and education are central to individual growth, to democratic self-governance, and to economic capabilities. Economic growth itself is crucially dependent upon innovation and information. For all these reasons information policy has become a critical elements of development policy and the question of how societies attain and distribute human welfare and well-being. Access to knowledge has become central to human development."

Proprietary systems for owning and controlling knowledge limit its flow and direct it to where people can pay for it. That is why so much pharmaceutical research is devoted to diseases of the rich and so little to diseases of the poor. Collaborative grass roots production of information and knowledge offers some distinct advantages. Not many people in the developing world can afford to buy the Encylcopedia Brittanica. But anyone with a computer and a modem can get access to Wikipedia.

3.3 Hybrids

Third sector organisations, and political parties, will seek to use the social web to sustain their organisations, engaging participants as "fans" through signing petitions, donating money, receiving email updates. In contrast disruptive innovations will encourage more participation from people as "hackers", they will tend to be more self governing. Some will attempt to mix the two. Howard Dean's failed bid to secure the Democratic nomination in 2004 rested on a delicate mix of the two: local groups doing things for themselves but all rallied around Dean's cause. A different example might be the Make Poverty History campaign, seen by many as a new model for campaigning.

Make Poverty History was backed by a coalition of organisations for a time limited campaign to change policies on debt, trade and aid for Africa. MPH utilised both old media – television and rock music – and the new media of the web. It was designed by those in and out of government to link campaigning to policy deliberation. Mass mobilisation was choreographed to set the context for the policy deliberations at the G8 summit at Gleneagles in July 2006. That linkage provided the point of the mobilisation but also ultimately one of its limitations.

For a while Make Poverty History became ubiquitous. In the UK 4.5m white wristbands were sold: the symbol of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty. About 225,000 people attended the rally on July 6th in Edinburgh. One million people attended concerts for Live 8 and 30m watched on television. In the UK Make Poverty History reached media saturation point, with an awareness score of 87%. Global Call to Action Against Poverty estimated 38m were involved in events in 75 countries.

New media was a far more important part of Make Poverty History than comparable campaigns. Word spread in part through banner ads that people could put on their own websites. The ads allowed people to click through to the central resources at MPH. About 53,000 people joined the virtual G8Rally by creating their own avatar and placard and placing themselves in a virtual map of Edinburgh. Overall MPH reached more than 800,000 activists online and 500,000 signed up to an email list.

One review by the NCVO and Hansard society concludes that MPH was an outstanding example of how to "effectively devolve the distribution of campaign messages to a supporter base." MPH's online effort worked because it treated people as potential participants and advocates not just donors.

But there were also a number of drawbacks and limitations. The Gleneagles summit gave the campaign a focus but that also meant that after the summit most campaigners were demobilised. MPH was not designed to leave behind a lasting internet infrastructure of the kind that has sustained Move.on in the US or Nosamo in South Korea. One reason for that is that the organisations running the campaign did not want to create local MPH chapters and give them campaigning tools, like those used by Howard Dean's campaign, for fear of losing control of the campaign. The terms of the coalition meant that all but 30,000 emails on the central mailing list had to be destroyed under data protection clauses. Thus the opportunity to create a massive web linked constituency in support of global anti poverty movement was missed.

The mobilisation (and subsequent demobilisation) around MPH missed the opportunity to create a lasting campaigning force on global poverty linked by the web that could have sustained a wide range of activities, online and offline for years to come. Constant campaigning pressure is needed to change the setting for policy deliberation.

4. Conclusions

The social web should help to revitalise the public democratic domain by :

- giving more people, more of a voice, extending freedom of speech and allowing a wider range of issues to be raised for public debate;
- creating forums in which people can come together to deliberate and debate public issues;
- amplifying people's voices by making it easier to mobilise campaigns.

This could be of particular benefit to those often kept at the margins of formal political debate or who feel disconnected from it. The social web may be a way to draw young people into politics and campaigning.

However some important qualifications need to be born in mind.

Technology does not determine politics. Japanese consumers are technology rich and adept but the spread of the Internet and sophisticated mobile services seems to have had little or no impact on politics.

Even where technology does allow politics to be conducted in a different way – the mobile phone orchestrated public protests in the Philippines – that does not change society's power structure. The Philippines is still governed by a rich minority, albeit one that is now accountable to the population in a new way.

Finally, more freedom of speech does not guarantee better democracy: it depends how it is organised. If people use this technology just to talk to other people who already share their views in tight social networks and discussion groups, they will find themselves in ideological echo chambers: hearing their own views and prejudices confirmed back to them. This will tend to reinforce and entrench existing political divides rather than bridge them. On the other hand, more voices may mean more cacophony rather than improved deliberation if people just talk past one another. Having freedom of speech does not guarantee anyone is listening to you.

The general challenge for policy makers – and society at large – is how to use the potential of the social web to maximise its democratic dividend and minimise these downsides. The UK is not at the global forefront of developments in web 2.0 or in mobile technologies. Most significant Web 2.0 innovations have come from the US. The most dynamic and innovative mobile markets are in Asia and the Nordic countries. As a result its possible the UK will miss opportunities to use these technologies to deepen democracy. Incumbent political organisations – campaigning third sector organisations and political parties – may not have a strong enough incentive to exploit these technologies to the full. The social web should make it easier for more people to become engaged in campaigns, causes and political issues. But they will not necessarily want to do so through established political and third sector structures. People care about causes not organisations. In future they will have new ways to engage with causes that may by pass traditional political and civic organisations. The social web may be good for social causes but unsettling for the incumbent civic organisations that have represented them.

We divide our recommendations into five main areas.

(i)   Social Web, Media Policy and Democracy

For the last fifty years broadcast media, television and radio, and newspapers have formed the information backbone for democratic debate. They provide the spaces in which issues are aired, reported and debated. What gets onto the television news gets attention.

The social web offers to create an alternative, overlapping structure for information and debate. That means Ofcom will be a central player in realising the social web's democratic potential.

A combination of social and technological innovation is making possible new forms of collective organisation, for how we create, share and distribute information, media and cultural products. These new ways of organising ourselves tend to be highly distributed, collaborative, participative and so low cost. The new forms of structured

self-organisation – witnessed now across fields from software and computer games, to music and basic information sharing – could bring our societies very large benefits in terms of competition, efficiency and innovation, freedom, democracy and social justice. But they also pose a significant challenge to all institutions – not just media organisations – that have relied on high barriers to entry and professional control of knowledge and information. This is a world in which as Yochai Benkler puts it :

"All the means of producing and exchanging information and culture are placed in the hands of hundreds of millions, and eventually billions, of people around the world, available for them to work with, not only when they are functioning in the market to keep body and soul together, but also, and with equal efficacy, when they are functioning in society and alone, trying to give meaning to their lives as individuals and as social beings."

The continued rise of social media production will not necessarily compete with, still less displace traditional media corporations. Indeed they could complement one another. Many corporations see opportunities in creating their own versions of social media, witness News Corporation's purchase of My Space. Successful campaigns like Make Poverty History mobilise old and new media in equal measure.

The media industries have relied upon high capital costs and barriers to entry for their competitive advantage. We now live in a world where any newspaper reader can also become a commentator and publisher. As barriers to entry tumble not surprisingly the incumbents have sought out new ways to shore up their position. So over the past two decades there has been a massive expansion in the coverage of intellectual property, copyrights and patents. One side effect could be to make it harder for people to use the social web for campaigning.

What rules of thumb should media regulators follow to maximise the democratic benefits of new media?

More than ever it matters to be clear about our ultimate goals: why we value media in terms of extending freedom, deepening democracy and improving social justice.

Different forms of ownership and organisation have to judged against what they do by these yardsticks, not just in the UK but globally.

Given the enormous potential contribution social media production can make, the basic question all regulators have to ask is whether enough space is being left for these new collaborative forms of activity to emerge.

Regulators must abstain from interventions that unwittingly or deliberately sustain incumbents while quashing scope for disruptive new entrants to emerge. Extensions to copyrights, patents and other forms of intellectual property may well reward current rights holders, without encouraging them to innovate more, and simultaneously make it harder for new collaborative models to emerge, which might in turn be the basis for new commercial and business models.

The aim of regulation should be to get the optimum mix of social and commercial, open and closed, proprietary and shared ownership media models. Britain needs to be the best place in the world for media, of all kinds, proprietary and social.

The future of public service media in this more participative age will thus be vital: the BBC, created as a broadcasting service should become a platform for mass participation, the centrepiece of Britain's cultural and media commons. Why did the BBC never come up with anything as radical, disruptive and global in its reach as Wikipedia?

Modern societies have developed in the context of mass media and industrial information production, which have shaped our view of where ideas come from, how debate takes place, who can be a commentator and who merely a sofa born consumer. A shift is underway, from media production *for* the masses to production *by* the masses, which will mean as Benkler puts it:

"Information and communications are core elements of autonomy and public, political discourse and decision making. Communication is the basic unit of social existence. Culture and knowledge, broadly conceived, form the basic frame of reference through which we come to understand ourselves and others in the world….the basic

components of human development depend on information and innovation and how we disseminate its implications."

Ofcom and its predecessors were designed for a world in which people needed protection as media consumers from over mighty newspaper and television magnates. It's role needs to be recast for a world in which more people will want to be media producers as well, in part for social and political causes.

Beyond that we would need to consider policies that would encourage digital citizenship, ensuring people have access to and skills to take part in democratic life that will be played out, part of the time, online. As Damian Tambini argues : "Citizenship requires a public sphere where rational critical evidence-based debated on the decisions facing us can be carried out." Clearly the social web is going to become more important to the provision of that sphere.

(ii)   Third Sector Organisations

How well is the UK third sector taking up the opportunities opened up by the social web?

British third sector organisations have undertaken quite a lot of sustaining technology innovations, developing email lists, websites and member databases. As one interviewee put it: "The voluntary sector is quite a capable but conservative user of digital tools." Third sector organisations show a growing interest in using wikis, social networks, podcasts and online forums for debate; but thus far there has been less action. There are more support and advice organisations such as Advocacy Online and Projectivity to help organisations plan their online strategies.

Some larger more sophisticated NGOs have created clever Web 2.0 type tools. Action Aid has created a kind of MySpace for fundraisers to share ideas. (Unlimited is considering a similar initiative and the Office of the Third Sector is seeking to develop an online innovation exchange.) Friends of the Earth has created a simple tool on its website that makes it easy for someone to fill in a Freedom of Information request. Greenpeace's Ocean Defender campaign encourages people to sign up to a

petition and to share their campaigning ideas. Oxfam's "I'm In" campaign was in effect a membership recruitment drive using text messaging. NGOs have used the technology to launch collaborative and time limited campaigns, for example against proposed changes to the Freedom of Information Act. Some smaller NGOs that lack resources have also been innovative in their use of technology, for instance the International Small Arms Network which brings together hundreds of smaller organisations. However in between large organisations that can innovate because they have resources and smaller organisations that innovate because they are fleet of foot, many third sector organisations are struggling to make much use of the social web.

Overall the UK civic sector seems to be lagging behind – some would say well behind the rate of innovation in the US.

As an NCVO report on the future of campaigning with participatory media put it: "Given the obvious fit between such technologies and the values and approaches of the VCS we may question why their uptake has not been wider." One reason is that campaigning skills and funds are in short supply especially for smaller NGOs which make up the bulk of organisations in the voluntary sector. Some established organisations feel threatened by the disruptive force of the web, fearing they may lose control of their members and their brands. Many fear that involving members too much may overload them or open the organisation up to risks – of libel or loss of reputation. The UK does not have, as the US does, venture philanthropists who have made their money from technology keen to promote social ventures using new technologies.

The most obvious steps which the government could help the sector as a whole with would be to:

- Promote learning from innovations in the US and elsewhere, including a possible International Web2.0 for social change conference to raise the sights and ambitions of the British third sector.

- Help to provide some shared resources and platforms that all third sector organisations could draw upon, a web campaigning platform and toolkit.

- Create an organisation comparable to NetSquared in the US, a collaborative community designed to foster innovation in technology empowered social change through blogging, case studies, meet ups, conferences and open source web tools. NetSquared is about to hold its second major conference to bring together non-profits, web developers and philanthropic funders to accelerate development. The UK needs an equivalent of NetSquared.

(iii) Disruptive Innovation

As yet there has been little or no disruptive innovation in campaigning from within the UK, apart from the use of mobile phone networks in the highly effective fuel tax protests of 2001 and the Countryside Alliance demonstrations. It is far from clear what role the government can and should play in fostering disruptive innovation. But it could encourage other funders – NESTA, the Young Foundation and the NCVO – to explore the potential. Disruptive innovations in this area may make life for government more uncomfortable. It should resist the inclination to close them down.

(iv) Government and Web 2.0

The government should do more to lead by example, developing its own use of social web tools. Several issues deserve more consideration:

Whether government information is provided in a way that makes it easy for social campaigners to use, including for example public information that might be "mashed-up" with maps and other data. Is government providing information in a way that encourages social campaigning?

Exploring how the government can work with the third sector in joint-ventures large and small which combine campaigning and policy deliberation. One example is the joint venture with Diabetes UK in a diabetes dialogue. Another example is how the lessons of Make Poverty History and Jamie's School Dinners could be applied to a campaign on child poverty. Government and the third sector need to find ways to collaborate on issues of shared importance that does not put at risk the third's sector's independence. One way forward will be the greater use of independent public deliberation to frame issues that then become the subject of joint campaigns so that both government and the third sector seem to start from the same point rather than the campaign implementing government policy. Third sector organisations are understandably wary of getting too close to government and being used to promote particular, possibly short term political agendas.

Both the government and the third sector need to become more adept at understanding how mobile technologies can be used to create personalised but mass campaigns, for instance over health, the environment and education. Evidence suggests that campaigns using mobile phones can mobilise large numbers of people so long as there is a clear call to action that comes from a friend. How could the persuasive power of mobile technologies be applied, for example, to the government's current campaign against over consumption of salt? Most people will not listen to a government minister telling them to eat less salt; more may listen to a friend or close peer offering the same advice.

(v) Global campaigns

Britain should promote global campaigns such as Make Poverty History using Web2.0 technologies. The stance the UK takes will have an impact on the possibilities of social action elsewhere in the world.

As Pippa Norris argues in the *Democratic Phoenix* an account of the rise of social movements and single issue politics: "The mant-to-many and one-to-many characteristics of the Internet multiply manifold the access points for publicity and information in the political system. The global dimension of the Web facilitates transnational movements transcending the boundaries of the nation state. The linkage capacity strengthens alliances and coalitions. Moreover…the values that pervade many transnational advocacy networks seem highly conducive to the irreverent, egalitarian and libertarian character of cyber-culture."

This could include:

- The promotion of Open Source software designed for use by human rights activists around the world.

- The provision of global knowledge banks and goods – such as environmental and geological data – that might be a resource for social campaigners.

- Making the promotion of open source web tools a part of aid policy.

References

To follow