

Towards the Global Information Industry and a new information paradigm

'Global Information Industry' is a big term, so let us begin by making sure we all know what it means. And let's start with 'Global'.

The entire human experience since Caveman days has confirmed the primacy of geographical proximity. You interacted with people who were near you; you acquired your supplies from those nearby; when you wanted information, you made contact with those in your geographical area. In geopolitical terms, this translated first into the local state, then into the nation state. A local state might be Virginia, a national state the *USA*; a local state *Wessex*, a national state *England*; a local state *Bavaria*; a national state *Germany*.

Associated with the era of 'the state' are concepts such as local autonomy, national sovereignty, cultural inheritance, independence, national pride, nationalism, chauvinism, xenophobia.

'Global' is a concept that contradicts all human cumulative experience, all human instincts: where are the data I am accessing being stored? Where is the machine on which these data are being processed?

- Bank ATMs and credit card verification
- 800 numbers (e.g. car rental).

If we have some conceptual problems with 'global', we may well find that 'information' is even worse, and I rue the day I made my career in something prefixed by the word 'information'. In a short opening presentation, there is no way we can develop a philosophical examination of the meaning of the term 'information'. But I would ask you to reflect on the fact that information, data, knowledge, intelligence, wisdom, etc. are not synonyms even if, too often, they are used as if they were:

"Your online access to the world's store of knowledge".

"Intelligence at your fingertips".

And, finally, 'information industry' embraces a wide community even outside the ranks of enablers such as telecommunication companies:

- newspapers, journals, magazines, books, handbooks
- text and bibliographic databases
- numeric data files
- networked individuals
- film, tv, radio, satellite broadcasting
- content-rich software, computer games
- conferences, exhibitions
- etc.

The Global Information Industry is thus a more powerful and more controversial phrase than it appears to be at first sight.

Global Information: the new paradigm

When you put information on a communications network, and when you interlink networks, several important and revolutionary things happen quite suddenly:

- export / import controls are no longer really feasible; national governments find it almost impossible to control which data enter their cyberspace, and which data are 'exported' on the networks. Viz Dialog and Moscow in 1984. "This information is restricted, and only 520 million people are allowed access to it."

- geography dissolves — there is no longer any realistic distinction between far away and near at hand (illogicality of STN and FIZ Karlsruhe)
- applicable law (based on geography and nation) is thrown into anarchy (viz., copyright, libel, defamation, pornography, subversion, publicly available, official secrets, etc.) Viz patents and pharmaceutical companies.
- in business, domestic / international cease to have real meaning — and even very small companies can communicate and trade globally
- *control* of news and information becomes either impossible, or extremely difficult. The traditional control media are:
 - ▶ direct government censorship and control (can be hidden as with LMSC; foreigners cannot operate tv stations in USA)
 - ▶ licensing / regulatory authorities (such as FCC, “all newspapers must be registered”, Polish telecoms regulations concerning data transmission speed to guard against export of military secrets)
 - ▶ libel / defamation laws (“slandering the state”)
 - ▶ advertising / sponsorship
- authors and publishers become more common / merged / democratised
- information culture changes, from regulated, national-based to unregulated, global.

“Throughout history, mass communication has always been tightly controlled by members of the ruling elite. In antiquity, crowds were perceived as a threat by the ruling elite and quickly (and usually violently) dispersed. In modernity, all forms of mass communications have been subject to either direct government ownership, indirect control, manipulation, and/or censorship through regulatory bodies such as the CRTC and the FCC, and further indirect control as the result of the mass media’s corporate sponsorship.”

Michael Strangelove, 'How to Advertise on the Internet', 1994

The Global information industry: challenges for 2001

Once information is networked, and networks interconnected:

- information *quantity* explodes
- *control* over content (by author, publisher, seller, legal system, national government . . .) is lost once content is released

The Global information industry: challenges for 2001

- how can we locate and collect, globally, just the data of interest to us?
- how can these data be analysed, verified and validated?
- how can we preserve our new freedoms of information from those who seek to restrict them for the usual reasons:
 - ▶ protect our children
 - ▶ honour our flag / beloved leader / government
 - ▶ emphasise just our religious beliefs
 - ▶ underline just our political beliefs
 - ▶ hide my snafus
 - ▶ prevent people less intelligence than me being led astray

“Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves.”

William Pitt, London, 18 Nov. 1783

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