Battle over the Internet

November 2012

Norman Lewis , Mindy Gofton , Keith Teare and Maria Kutar introduced a discussion about our aspirations for using the Internet, chaired by Martyn Perks

It's hard for most of us to imagine life without the Internet, even though it's actually quite a recent development. Although not originally envisioned as the ubiquitous entity it now is, its elegant design of distributed command and control means that its management and future have always been contested and to a large extent, in our own creative hands. Whilst many of the early wrangles through organisations like the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EEF) seem to have waned, the focus of discussion is much more on the form and content of communication rather than its technology or administration.

Our contemporary discussions may lack some of the bite and vision embedded in battles around the technologies of Web 1.0, so what are the ideological battlegrounds today as we move through the technologies of the Web 2.0 era, and how can we best shape the emerging trends as emerge into the truly mobile inter-connected network. Communication forums such as Twitter and Facebook have been celebrated for their role in helping to facilitate the uprisings across the Arab nations recently, and regimes acting to suppress such communications rightly labelled as authoritarian. With a different focus and reason for restricting communications via

the Internet, many champions of freedom of expression against Arab regimes, seek to regulate the freedom to express challenging views of hurtful comments towards minority groups.

Whilst social media has been celebrated for facilitating the Arab Spring, there is also growing pressure for more regulation to protect us from other citizens on the internet. User Generated Content (UGC) is clearly at the heart of Facebook and Twitter, but to what extent is the 'user' driving innovative developments in the technology, and to what extent is such technology sucking us dry of our truly creative potential.

Are the demands for more regulation and control of social media likely to enhance our experience or may they be part of the reason why the public IPO of Facebook for example, was considered to be so problematic, and will ultimately lead to such innovations becoming more stultifying? As more of our communication on the internet moves over to mobile devices, will the investments required for platform development become a barrier to innovation or will our desire for progress overcome such structural and technical issues?

Join our speakers in exploring what's behind these seemingly contradictory approaches, and discuss how we can best shape the future of the internet for our own benefit.

Video playback of the speakers' introductions and initial comments available via YouTube (**thanks to Dan Clayton**
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documentary film maker
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Video playback of the audience contributions and speaker responses available via YouTube (**thanks to Dan Clayton**
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documentary film maker
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Some background readings

On a tiny island, catchy Web name sparks a battle , By Christopher Rhoads, Post Gazette 29 March 2006

Who controls the internet? by Misha Glenny, Financial Times 8 October 2010

Q&A: The network neutrality debate , BBC News Technology 22 December 2010

The revolution will not be tweeted , by Martyn Perks, spiked review of books 28 April 2011

The rise of the clicktivists: will the revolution be digitised? Battle of Ideas 30 October 2011

David Cameron to consider forcing ISPs into 'opt-out' porn block , by Mark Brown, Wired 4 May 2012

We are the droids we're looking for: the New Aesthetic and its friendly critics , by JJ Charlesworth, Blog 7 May 2012

Pirate Party: giving politics a jolly roger , by Matthias Heitmann, spiked 15 May 2012

'Safe is bad': Andrew Keen on Digital Vertigo , by Laura June, The Verge 22 May 2012

The Facebook Illusion , by Ross Douthat, New York Times 26 May 2012

Why I don't 'Like' this mauling of Zuckerberg , by Norman Lewis, Futures-Diagnosis 28 May 2012

The arrest of the Tom Daley tweeter was not an isolated act , by Brendan O'Neill, The Telegraph 1 August 2012

Reach Out and Touch Someone: Technology and the Promise of Intimacy , Dr Peter Petralia, 16 August 2012

Apple v Samsung: innovation's the loser , by Martyn Perks, spiked 29 August 2012

'AuthorRank', Privacy and Google's Attitude to Online Identities , by Mindy Gofton, I-Com blog 25 September 2012

Troll-hunters are the real menace to the internet , by Brendan O'Neill, spiked 27 September 2012

Discussion Partners

This is the first time the Manchester Salon have partnered with the BCS Manchester Branch , The Chartered Institute for IT in Greater Manchester (formerly known as British Computer Society), who promote wider social and economic progress through the advancement of information technology science and practice. They bring together industry, academics, practitioners and government to share knowledge, promote new thinking, inform the design of new curricula, shape public policy and inform the public. Given the importance of advancing society through an extensive use oif technology, we hope there will be many more collaborations in the future.

The Manchester Salon is participating in the fabulous Manchester Science Festival for the third year running, where you can explore the wonder of science with nine days of events designed to highlight and explore the myriad ways that science touches our lives; enjoy beautiful installations, films on the big screen in a beautiful warehouse setting, immersive science experiences, intriguing evening events, inspiring talks and debates, hands-on workshops and more during 27 October - 4 November 2012. Manchester Science Festival is proudly produced by MOSI, see
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