

Chapter 15

Epilogue: Retrospective and Prospective Reflections

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the editors present a brief summary commentary and reflective overview of the emergent themes, issues, and problematic areas the chapter authors have drawn to readers' attention in this book, and the editors tentatively indicate some potential or possible future directions for research and development of global business. They recognize that there are rapidly changing social mores and culture is a fluid but deep river running through diverse channels in the Lifeworlds and Workworlds of leaders today. They point to the perceived gap in leadership in reference to the uptake and understanding of these digital technologies and suggest that the implications include new ways of thinking as well as new competences for changing ways of working in the networked world of business. Crucially, the editors also reiterate that these are deeply human endeavors, and as such, the complexity of the technology does not negate or overwhelm the interactive dynamic complexity of human relations between leaders and others who inhabit and who view these conjoined worlds through many cultural windows.

INTRODUCTION

We are in a new world of instant and relatively inexpensive communication devices and all organizations with access to the increasingly ubiquitous digital technology can interact globally from many formerly inaccessible locations. However, as we have suggested in various chapters in this book and in our last book, the impact of such digital technology goes far beyond the confines of business

organizations. Socio-digital media for example have not only increased business conferencing and interaction between distant colleagues but it can also be reasonably asserted with confidence that social discourse and human interaction in other realms has also grown massively as a result.

It has been estimated that registered users now exceed one billion people globally and that this will climb to 2.5 billion by 2017 including 93% of marketers, 70% of which also have a Google +

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6134-9.ch015

Epilogue

account and Facebook is a major presence globally. The USA leads the world in terms of average time spent online each day although 86% of their users are outside the continental USA (Smith, 2013; Jones, 2013; eMarketer report, 2014). In 2013 47% of Americans surveyed indicated that Facebook is their primary influencer for purchases they made compared to 24% in 2011 (Jones, 2013).

Of course there are cultural variations and the preferences seen in many countries as to how such media ought to be utilized by people and businesses as well as differential access for local people thus influencing penetration rates especially in emerging nations (Solis, 2012, Smith, 2013, Pew Research, 2012). At present, Chinese social media is running closely behind USA and other developed countries but is effectively in 'catch up' mode (Smith, 2013; eMarketer report, 2014). The cultural impacts have been shown for instance in the varied reactions of users to service providers seeking their real identities before allowing them to sign up; the so-called 'nymwars' whereby users have resisted giving real names, instead preferring pseudonyms in certain countries.

International tourism for example is reported as continuing to rise, albeit with variations and some perceived slowing in particular tourist destinations according to the UNWTO. The latter organization's report suggests a steady 3-4% growth forecast till 2030 (UNWTO, 2013). However, in this more geographically mobile world where travel abroad for holidays or business is becoming increasingly commonplace and is continuing to increase according to reports (UNWTO, 2014) there are continuing variations between regions.

However, forms of instant social networking and communication are an obvious boon and particularly popular with the millennial demographic (Acheive, 2013). More than ever before, smartphone purchases are rising as these devices have found favor with millennials in particular "Smartphone usage continues to rise, as mobile devices best enable the connectivity and news information gathering from peers, mobile content

sources, and organizations that Millennials seek." (Acheive, 2013). This technology has also helped overcome limitations and constraints of time and space and applications such as Skype or Facetime, that enable and encourage people to stave off loneliness or homesickness by keeping in touch regularly with friends and relatives living far away.

Such technologies can also be disruptive in social, economic and business terms as well as culturally. Castells (2007) has hypothesized that a number of media trends are converging towards change in the relationship between the leaders or the powerful and between them and those who contest their influence or those who wish to resist such leaders. Among these media trends are the emergence of new forms of socio digital communication technologies (and adaptations to them such as 'Google bombing' and 'Googlewashing') now in the armory of some activists and resisters. Such adoption and adaptations are discussed in detail in earlier chapters. He sees these challenges and the growing use of weapons such as 'Google bombs' as "...cultural battles that are fought to a large extent in the communication realm "(Castells, 2007, p257). Nevertheless, the disruptive digital technology referred to in this and in our last volume is about more than communications technology per se.

Innovaro (2013) confirmed the broad disruptive technology trends we outlined in the last book apply (Smith & Cockburn, 2013). Basically these trends in disruptive technologies are summarized in the list below:

1. Mobile Internet
2. Automation of knowledge work
3. The Internet of things
4. Cloud technology
5. Advanced robotics
6. Autonomous and near-autonomous vehicles
7. Next-generation genomics
8. Energy storage
9. 3D printing
10. Advanced materials

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