

Is Internet narrowing our view?

Internet has given us the possibility to access to an overwhelming quantity of contents and to choose what we want to see. But does that mean that we are more informed?

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Over the past years, Internet users all over the world have changed their way to 'consume' news, tending to retrieve the important information from a number of newspaper websites, blogs and other sites on the web.

Even if in 80% of the countries newspaper circulation has been stable or continued to grow last year, in developed economies, they are facing the worst crisis in their history. A strong decrease in newspapers' sellings has forced restructuring in diaries such as The New York Times -which has now debts for more than \$1 billion-. With the spread of the Internet, catching readers' attention is becoming more and more difficult as people can shift easily from a news source to another.

Internet is now becoming the hub for political information and discussions and the recent Obama campaign confirms its importance in shaping the public opinion. It is said to have brought openness into our world, allowing us to meet people

from diverse realities and opinions. However, communitarianism in the web seems to go in the opposite sense of that supposed openness.

The information shift towards the Internet is not without consequences and changes the way we perceive current news and form our own opinion. What is exactly happening with the public discussion and what is Internet changing?

The rise of different points of view

Jürgen Habermas talks about traditional media as consensus manufacturers. In fact, by reaching large audiences, public debates can clearly be exposed to the society and opinion trends can easily be traced. However, over the last ten years, with the lowering of the entry-costs in the media production, many players have entered in the media market.

This fragmentation of the media cake, boosted by the Internet, has multiplied the points of view, giving voice to groups that were neglected before, shaping new audi-

ences and stealing away the traditional power of large newspapers and TV channels as opinion trenders.

Everyone wants to be part of that adventure and a set of tools have been created to allow users to give their own feedback, express their own opinions and even to themselves become a media through blogging.

The egocentric power to choose

The facility in which the web can be fed makes that everything can be found in it, from Nazi groups such as the ones denounced in Germany last week, to pornography, birds' amateurs and Obama supporters. Everyone can have a place on the Internet and find like-minded people across the world. Thousands of communities have been created and it is worthless explaining here phenomena such as Myspace or Facebook.

Overwhelmed by the enormous quantity of information on the web, we are obliged to choose our "friend circles"; "our business circles" and obviously our "information circles". As a libertarian

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space, the Internet gives us the entire responsibility to choose what we want to read, which video we want to see and who we want to talk to. With the power of controlling what we want to be told, we are rarely exposed to coincidences and 'out-of-the-track' information. This personalization of the web tends to be more efficient as targeting techniques-'buy similar books' in Amazon; 'friends in common' in Facebook- tend to direct our web experience.

A narrow vision of the world

In short, in our virtual life we are always fleeing away from disagreement. Instead of watching TV in our sofa and being exposed to programs that we are not keen to see or coming across articles in the newspapers that we do not agree with, we prefer to navigate through a friendly world in which our opinions and wishes are reconforted.

This voluntary isolation brings two main problems: we are hardly becoming aware of topics that are outside our normal sphere of interest -in TV there are often History documentaries, when was the last time you saw one on Youtube?- and we are less exposed to the arguments of people who think in a different way.

The American elections blogosphere

All of this can be exemplified with the American blogosphere during the 2008 elections. Presidential Watch is a website that tracks the most important Republican