

How are the increasing amounts of peer-to-peer produced news material affecting a sustainable development?

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"OhmyNews.com is the most influential online news site in South Korea, attracting an estimated 2 million readers a day. What's unusual about OhmyNews.com is that readers not only can pick and choose the news they want to read – they also write it. With the help of more than 26,000 registered citizen journalists, this collaborative online newspaper has emerged as a direct challenge to established media outlets in just four years". [1]

OhmyNews is a good example on how the development of Information Technology (IT) has changed the conditions for the media field. The digital camera, the cell phone and the Internet, with tools such as blogs, online communities and file sharing networks are examples of new inventions that have helped people to fast and easy consume, spread and produce information. Estimations states that by 2021 fifty percent of all news material will be produced peer-to-peer. From a political view, this change makes it easier to access and spread information and can therefore help to promote democracy and strengthen the freedom of speech. A positive effect the on environmental sustainability is that more information will be sent in digital form instead of being printed on paper. But seen from an economical perspective, the success for peer-to-peer produced news material is a threat to the more traditional news media and to the present copyright laws.

What risks are there if the importance of traditional news media is reduced? Will there be less news reporting from areas where few people have access to computers? Is there a risk that people shut their eyes for what happens in poor third world countries? One way to prevent such a development and secure social sustainability can be projects like One Laptop per Child [2].

OLPC is an organization that designs, manufactures, and distributes millions of inexpensive laptops to school children in developing countries. For a sustainable development it is important that future services are available for everyone, including elderly, dyslectics and people with poor vision. But what happens when everyone starts using the Internet?

"When everyone get access to Internet and publish their opinions this will not necessarily raise the quality of the discussion. There is a risk that good opinions will be drowned by the mediocre --- maybe it provides too much information, too fast, such that the stability of the society is threatened?" [3]

To avoid information overload, we must have tools that can optimize access to information on the basis of individual user's interest. In February 2007, the top four most visited web sites on the Internet were all traditional search engines [4], a fact that shows their importance for people's use of the Internet. Another type of tool to organize information online that has grown in popularity over the last years is called Folksonomy. It is a user-generated taxonomy for categorizing and retrieving web content by labeling. del.icio.us is an example of a web site that uses folksonomic labeling by letting their users save and label web bookmarks with descriptive words [5].

I think that peer-to-peer produced will have an important influence on a more sustainable development, but it is of great importance that all people are given the possibility to use good working tools and services for consume and produce this information.

Bibliography

1. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, "We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information", July 2003, The Media Center at the American Press Institute, <http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/>

A book about the ongoing changes in the media world, explores how traditional and participatory journalism are converging.

2. One Laptop per Child, <http://www.laptop.org/>, last visited February 16, 2007.

A non-profit organization created by faculty members from the MIT Media Lab. By design, manufacture, and distribute millions of inexpensive laptops to developing countries, OLPC wants to give "all children in the world access to knowledge and modern forms of education".

3. Håkan Gullikson, "HITI and Quality of Life, Introduction and overview vs. 1.131. An essay by Håkan Gullikson", January 2007, Applied System Technology, Umeå University.

A paper that discuss if, when, and how IT can improve our quality of life.

4. Alexa Internet Ranking – Top 500, <http://www.alexa.com>, last accessed February 16, 2007.

Alexa is a website that provides information about traffic on the Internet.

5. del.icio.us, <http://del.icio.us/>, last accessed February 16, 2007.

A social bookmarks manager where users save links to web pages to a personal account. The bookmarks are categorized with keywords (Folksonomy) and can be shared with other del.icio.us users.

Bonus:

Dan Gillmor, "We the Media: Grassroots Journalism By The People, For the People", 2004, <http://wethemedia.oreilly.com/>

A book about how the blogosphere has changed the way news is handled. The media corporations does not control the news any longer, they are published for free on the Internet, available to everyone.

