Omnipresence:
*The Future of News Technology and Its Effects on American Politics.*

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 As we build out technology to better fit our ideals of a seamlessly interconnected world, we also craft these systems to mirror some of our best and worst qualities. From cumulative knowledge and criticism, to fast-paced low-thought news bytes that reflect the -now,now,now’ness- of our A.D.D. culture. With that in mind, I believe the future of news and news technology will mainly boil down to a few core concepts: Omnipresence, specialization, and most importantly interactivity. With focus on global technological trends and research on popular use I want to examine how these concepts will materialize and shape the modern world.
 What we find when looking at the big picture is that technology is not the type of thing you can posit absolute truth claims about because the nature of invention itself is uncertain and constantly changing. However, there are reoccurring trends and themes which can be tracked and at least somewhat accurately predicted upon. Technology always seems to link us together, to improve upon our natural abilities, and can be used to improve the general happiness of our lives. As we enter into the meat of the paper I want to make it clear, I'm not trying to peer into a crystal ball and accurately pinpoint the day that we will all drive our flying pollution-free cars to work. The goal is to consider where trends and themes seem to be leading and what that means for local and global politics.
 We want our news immediately, accurately, and relevant, but how will technology help to make those wishes a reality for the everyday American? As wireless internet and mobile devices become ubiquitous, physical papers will be phased out as antiquated and environmentally unfriendly. What about news television? We've replaced traditional journalists and editors with Algorithms: RSS feeds, Widget Updates, and Twitter posts. With inventions like the Ipad, Iphone, and netbooks we see that people increasingly want their information on-the-go. Mobility and access is the key. Fitting in with increased access and mobility or as I say Omnipresence, I think it's important to track and discover whether a few sentences posted on a social-networking site is sufficient to inform the American people. Or, more accurately, we need to ask whether or not being exposed to more news at faster speeds equals out to a more informed public. Does popping out and hoarding up the latest apple product really educate people on world events? The future of News Technology will certainly be a powerful force, but will it better us or do we overestimate our competence? A quote comes to mind, often credited to Mark Kennedy, “All of the biggest technological inventions created by man - the airplane, the automobile, the computer - says little about his intelligence, but speaks volumes about his laziness.” I’m not quite this pessimistic but we must consider what our true motivation is when we build up our technological future. Do we really want to be informed, or are we looking for entertainment and ego-validation. Another way we might put it: Do we really want to be shown the truth or just repeatedly told that we already have it?
 As long as we are unpacking the disconsolate facts, we also need to remember exactly how many people actually are interested in news verses people who might tune in on occasion to see if something worth talking about has occurred. According to a study by the Pew Research Center in August of ’07, the average number of people who tune in daily and follow news stories closely in America varies from about twenty to thirty percent. However, when the news covers a story about terrorism or a natural disaster these numbers can rise anywhere from forty all the way to sixty percent. (Robinson2007). Although this may highlight the empathetic nature of mankind, it also displays something much less inspiring: That as much as 40% of news viewership at times can be attributed to shock value and fad-viewership. That is, it will be short-lived and knowledge about events other than the disaster is unlikely to be gained.
 We can probably attribute the popularity of Twitter and application-based news to those numbers, why filter through the 5 O’clock news story to hear what you want when you can get instant updates in your pocket? Especially when you can be updated specifically when “big things” happen, and not be bothered with things that don’t interest you. The negative effect of course is that bills being passed, congressmen retiring, and foreign policy updates tend to only interest a pitifully small portion of the people, while shock events tend to interest everyone else. Therein, we find the recipe for a very sickly version of democracy, where the people know much about disaster and terror but know very little about the policies and leaders we have combating them. This only adds to the complexity of news media and news technology, that the outcomes are not only contingent on world events but also our ability to assess and respond to them.
 Predicting the future of politics alone is no easy task, empires rise and fall for several reasons…many of which probably seemed dubious at the time. Now, add to that the seemingly impossible future of technology and I’m starting to look more and more overly-ambitious. Technology has a rich history of taking the most nonsensical science-fiction and turning it into commonplace everyday realities. Imagine the idea of communicating with someone thousands of miles away before the invention of the telegraph system. Think of how greatly challenging it would be to describe the internet and its monumental impact on modern society to the average Joe from 1960. Explain the social and cyber revolution caused by websites like Myspace, Twitter, and Facebook to someone from 1995. Technology grows exponentially, every day, all the time.

**Interactivity:**
 Perhaps the most obvious and observable change technology will bring to the political sphere is interactivity. It used to be that you registered and at some point you voted, then after a rather dispiriting wait you would see in the newspaper or hear over the radio whether or not you had succeeded at guiding democracy. The problem that modern and future technology solves is this disconnection between public opinion as it is, and what is actually being reported. What this means in layman's terms is that we will know when the majority of people really love those whom they elect or it was simply the astounding distaste for the opponents or the charming and attractive personality of the one who won. Interactivity can clear the smoke around over-romanticized political events as well. Some stories might have misled the people into voting one way or the other. In the past if a story was later altered, corrected, and dismissed you simply lived with it...if you ever found out in the first place. Today we can do polls and research instantaneously over the web, allowing for public opinion to be reflected much more accurately. Rather than in response to political mistakes or fictitious reporting, it is in spite of them.
 The moral to be learned here is that democracy is always changing because the people are. The ability to participate in and accurately represent yourself in the political sphere is paramount to a brighter future for America. Obviously, being able to do this in real-time means greater accuracy and better informed politicians on the public opinion. Today many of the largest news corporations host polls and questionnaires live on their websites or allow 'Text-In' voting on important topics. According to the research of Gartner Inc., *By the end of 2010, 1.2 billion people carried handsets capable of rich, mobile commerce providing a rich environment for the convergence of mobility and the Web. There are already many thousands of applications for platforms such as the Apple iPhone, in spite of the limited market and need for unique coding(Gartner Inc. 2010).* What we deduce from this is that it’s only a matter of time before the idea of receiving the news and looking at your mobile devise will be seamless. The notion of sitting in front of your television and waiting for the story will be as antiquated as going to the library to check out a book. We will get our literature from the internet and read it on our eReaders, likewise, we will get our news from applications and read them from our phone. We will also see a change in what we understand news to mean, it will no longer be something dumped unto us from above, but be something we actively participate in. News will not be watched, it will be done. During interviews with important figures Facebook and Twitter questions are often addressed along with questions from live audience members. This is even more important than it appears in that it gives a voice to many people unable to directly participate in politics. For instance, those who are part of America but don't actually live in the continental states. It's also important because our allies and friendly nations can weigh-in and help sway decisions from across the world. As a world super-power, our political system must be guided both by its own citizens, but also by all the people world-wide whose lives are affected by the decisions we make.
 So why is it so important that we are constantly improving our ability to interact in real-time with the political system? Why should we really care? The answer, in short, is because it narrows the gap between the government and the people it should be representing. In a democracy there is wisdom in the crowd, knowing what the group thinks now can help to make popular decisions in the future. Insofar as elections, it means that candidates and parties can be kept in check, kept in line with what their constituents actually want. Politicians will know if there is a sudden drop in support and try to find and neutralize the cause. This may mean highlighting some values to certain demographics while downplaying them to others. However, we don't have to be completely cynical...It can also lead to a group actually changing their platform and realigning goals to better match those whom they represent. What the interactive age of news technology means is that as we progress, news will slowly but surely become a verb rather than a noun.
 **Specialization:**

 Interactivity isn't the most useful concept if you aren't weighing in on issues that actually interest you. This is the second core concept: specialization. It doesn't make sense to talk about whole populations being able to text and vote online if we don't actually talk about the devices which enable them to do so. Smart phones and Tablet Pc's have proven themselves to be the wave of the future for this generation of electronics. The whole idea is to have the news and information you want streamlined into your pocket. The consequences of this include more people knowing about world events as they happen, but it also means people will often only be informed of the specialized area that holds most of their interest. As mentioned before, most peoples interests don’t seem to be synchronized well with the issues and events that actually matter in the day-to-day political sphere. Most of the apps out now, a trend that will likely continue, offer the ability to highlight certain areas of news while muting others. In the optimistic sense it means the politician worrying about election results or trying to stay up to date on his opponents strategy won't have to weed through football scores or foreign events.
 Without misplacing our skepticism, we might also point out that this can have the opposite effect. Many people can purposely tune out important world and national events to only hear about sports scores or tech gadget updates. It used to be you had to sit through a segment on the television and hear everything before whatever specific information you wanted came up. With this specialized and personalized mobile news revolution anyone can bypass the earthquake, the hurricane, the protests, the war, and go straight to the release date of the next Macbook pro or similar device with comparable coverage and hype. This is the flip-side of technological empathy, although we do tend to tune in to disasters, our response if often text-message charity. The future may be that a huge majority of our desires can be satisfied by tapping on a touch screen. This includes the desire to help others, but obviously seems insufficient. In fact, despite the instant updates of disasters and socially networked volunteer opportunities the amount of people who volunteered without pay in 2010 actually dropped. (www.bls.gov 2011) So while the stories we hear are more precisely aimed on what interests us, it is clear our ability to genuinely use this technology to help others is lackluster. It may be that ‘text-message empathy’ isn’t a replacement for traditional acts of charity, but an excuse to ignore them.

**Omnipresence:**
 The growth of mobile phone services was initially a primarily Asian phenomenon with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan all soon finding the majority of their Internet users accessing resources by phone rather than by PC. Developing countries followed, reporting that the majority of their domestic users accessed the Internet from a mobile phone rather than a PC. The European and North American use of the Internet began with a base of personal computers breaking a bubble so to sepeak, becoming very popular very quickly. The growth of mobile phone Internet access was more gradual, but had reached national penetration levels of 20–30% in most Western countries. In 2008, mobile phones were connecting to the internet than personal computers. “In many parts of the developing world, the ratio is as much as 10 mobile phone users to one PC user.” (Hillebrand 2002)
 So let’s see how far this ability for more and more people to communicate instantly with 'the powers at be' can really go. Many of the most radical and militant groups remain that way because they are misunderstood, isolated, and feel powerless. When a group feels powerless they often overcompensate by being overly aggressive, sometimes even violent. A more interactive political system creates the opportunity for more voices to be heard, helping to dissolve the militancy of groups who feel powerless in the status quo. This reading out of “Our Interactive World” a political section of CNN/Time's website highlights this actually happening, and as far back as 2000. “Technology is energizing grassroots politics of all stripes: call it powering up. In the Philippines, protesters using cell-phone text messaging mobilized hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in January to help oust President Joseph Estrada. Miguel Arroyo, husband of new President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, says her supporters kept urging everyone to head to the edsa shrine, the main focus of the People Power II movement. "We texted everybody to go running there: 'edsa. edsa: everybody converge on edsa!'" In China, tens of thousands of followers of the spiritual group Falun Gong continue to exist—despite a harsh crackdown—in a vibrant community fed by the Web and encrypted text messaging. Last November, after learning from foreign news sites of the arrival of the first American President since the Vietnam War, hundreds of thousands of citizens lined the streets of Hanoi to welcome Bill Clinton despite a state information blackout. And in Mexico, the Zapatistas have swapped AK-47s for online propaganda and Web sit-ins. E-support for their call for indigenous rights has spread from the jungles of Chiapas to the outside world, culminating in an internationally backed march on Mexico City two months ago. "We do not believe that only nation-states have the legitimate authority to engage in war and aggression," says the Zapatista-allied Electronic Disturbance Theater. "We see cyberspace as a means to enter present and future arenas of conflict, and to do so across international borders." (Time Magazine 2001) I think this is a perfect example of how groups who would otherwise feel cornered and hyper-defensive now have a voice and community to voice concerns and organize realistic goals in order to improve government. So we see that a more interactive News media not only represents a more pure form of democracy for loyal voters but also a peaceful arena for activists to be heard and participate as citizens. The future of News technology is not the gleaming socially aware change we might dream about, but there are plenty of pros to match the cons. Any time people become more connected, the world gets a little smaller, and it becomes easier to gain the understanding it takes to conquer the problems of the future. It seems the average citizen may not suddenly become an expert or even passionate on politics or news, but through increased interconnectivity that passion will at least be easy to cultivate once it’s desired. Interactivity and Specialization are the personality traits of future news, but perhaps omnipresence will be its salvation.

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