



Free Press Viewpoint

Internet society bypasses old filters

Internet social networks are an interesting phenomenon. While they have only been around in full force since about 2002-2003, they have taken on an incredible amount of popularity. This popularity has earned social networks a lot of scorn as well.

Some of it is well founded. Social networks have some of the same inherent problems as the old internet chat rooms. For instance they rely on trust – trust that, if you don't know the person on the other end of the internet cable in real life, they are who they say they are. There are many terrible examples of this – rapes, murders, abductions – but there are also many positive things that can come out of social networks.

Like any new medium, the use of it often outgrows its original intent. At their most basic level, these sites allow people to talk to the world without a government or media filter. Internet social networks can be a powerful tool for change and revolution, as we recently saw in Iran. The world would not have known even half the extent of these protests had it not been for Iranians, many of them young students, who used these networks as a means to expose the actions of their repressive government to the world.

Most foreign journalists were blocked from the country, so who could we turn to? Through internet social sites like Facebook, Myspace and Twitter we were able to see images of riots and police crack downs and hear stories of protesters being killed for suggesting corruption. And those are just the big three sites. They are so many and so varied that they are difficult to completely block. You don't have to risk life and limb smuggling a video tape or a photo across the border when you can just upload it to the net.

Imagine if the European Jewish community had access to this 60 years ago, or the Rwandans in the 90s. It's too easy to turn a blind eye to the suffering of a group when you don't know much or can't see what's going on. Social networks can allow people in repressive regimes to get the word out. They are a tool to empower the people, the "Common Sense" for our time, though perhaps not quite so eloquent.

And Iran isn't the first example. Last April, an American journalist was covering a protest in Egypt and was thrown in jail. He managed to upload a post to his Twitter account informing people he was incarcerated. In fact he only posted one word: "arrested." This launched a successful effort by his friends, Egyptian bloggers no less, to get him out of jail. Getting locked up abroad is not a pleasant prospect, and letting people know you are in jail is often key to getting out of it intact.

For most people, social networks are simply a way to keep in touch with far-flung relatives or friends; a way to socialize without leaving home with all of the good and bad things that entails. Its easy to scoff at social networks for this reason, but they can also be a powerful force for the free flow of information.

– Kevin Bottrell

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes @ nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell @ nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard @ nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan and Aubrey Spencer - Society Editors
colby.society @ nwkansas.com

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Strive for a free society through protests

Social movements and protests are no longer seen as attractive to the majority of the American people.

When people hear about protests these days, it usually conjures up images of hippies, radicals and anarchists shouting obscenities and breaking things. Protesting is now seen as anti-American – unless it is directed at lowering taxes and serving a corporate agenda like opposition to health care reform.

In other words, acceptable protest these days is about individual self-interest over the collective good. This must certainly please corporations who have gotten rich off policies promoting short-term gains over frivolous externalities like workers rights and the environment, but it's hard to see how it has helped everyday Americans.

The decline of protest politics in favor of a strict adherence to private self-interest has created an unhealthy culture in our country. The idea that private enterprise is more about making a profit than it is about serving people is promoted with almost religious fervor by some of today's economists. But they underestimate the desensitizing effect this can have on a group of people.

There is hardly much room for a community atmosphere in a culture that embraces "kill or be killed" capitalism. This kind of system does nothing but restrict human potential by teaching people that they are nothing more than one-dimensional beings who care about money over everything else. The fact that we are the only industrial country whose government



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

doesn't provide health care to all its citizens should not surprise anyone, since this would require a the individual to sacrifice for the public good. This kind of idea is considered subversive by many economists who warn that any deviation from free-market principles will lead to creeping socialism.

The biggest remedy for injustice and greedy self-interest in this country has been social movements. I'm always a little annoyed when cynics mock the idea that social activism and protest movements are incapable of creating change in this country. In reality it is the only thing that has ever created change in this country.

Since the beginning of this country's founding we have been protesting for our rights. From the revolutionary patriots who declared war on the British Empire, to the women's rights movement, to the populist movement, to the labor movement, to the Chicano movement, to the civil rights movement, to the gay rights movement, to the environmental movement it has always been the people who have pushed our government to enact policies that eliminate injustice and inequality. The cynics

who deride the idea that ordinary citizens have the ability to create change seem to forget that they would be unable to enjoy the lifestyle we all take for granted today if it were not for the ordinary citizens who marched on the streets to demand that this country live up to the ideals it's supposed to stand for.

This is not to say people who made up these various movements were perfect. Many of them had their own moral weaknesses whether it be racism, blind nationalism or a number of other shortcomings that all of us seem to be shackled with. But their willingness to risk their reputations, and in some instances their lives, to try and fix a flawed culture should be something all Americans can celebrate. It's so easy to be cynical and to decide that the world is going to hell and it's not your problem. But I'm thankful for the illogical people who said the world is going to hell and it is my problem and I'm going to do something to fix it.

I'm not calling for an end to capitalism or anything like that. I'm just saying that this country is more than just a group of individuals battling each other for the top spot on the corporate ladder and we shouldn't except a thought doctrine that tells us we are. We should strive for a more human form of capitalism that serves everyone as opposed to just a small group of shareholders.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

'Mere seat time' in classroom isn't minor

"Mere seat time" is the charge. All of that time you spent sitting in high school class seats doesn't prove anything, according to the education reformers who have brought us an unending cascade of failed experiments for the last 30 years. Now they want to kill the Carnegie Unit.

Kansas requires students to take a minimum of 21 Carnegie Units for a high school diploma: four in English, three in history and government, three in science, three in math, one in physical education/health, one in fine arts and six in electives. The Carnegie Unit, developed in 1906, measures the amount of time a student has studied a subject. 120 hours in one course, meeting four or five times a week in 40-60 minute classes, for 36-40 weeks earns a student one Carnegie Unit of high school credit. In Kansas, a local school board can increase requirements beyond the 21 unit state minimum.

For the last ten years, educationists have been denouncing the Carnegie Unit and promoting "outcomes" measured by tests given external to the teacher's course. "What does sitting in a class for a year prove?" they ask, showing total disregard for the learning activities provided by the teacher and ignoring that teachers do indeed give tests. A student who has not learned under this "mere seat time" will get an "F" and have to take the class again.

Outcomes fanatics ignore the fact that it does take time to learn. Veteran teachers, through experience, have refined coursework so it is delivered at a speed that most students can learn. Good teachers also modify lessons for both slower and gifted students. There is no instantaneous learning. Learning takes time.



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

"Seat time" is valuable. None of us are using "mere seat time" to award academic credits. Anyone using this phraseology deserves a trip to the woodshed.

Replacing the Carnegie Unit with outcomes assessment dramatically pushes students into test-prep coursework. All of the in-depth discussions and critical questioning of good classes becomes a "waste of time" when learning is to raise the test score. The students' attention focuses solely on memorization and preparation for a narrow set of testable items.

We do not allow medical candidates to sit for the medical board exams until they have finished medical school. We do not allow law students to sit for the bar exam until they have finished law school. The reason is simple. You learn the skills to be in the courtroom or surgical ward in classrooms and labs, not by studying for a paper-and-pencil test. The tests are limited to sampling a few measurable benchmarks. Yet educationists are eager to throw away the full and rich learning experience of the classroom for test prep. Simply, they do not know the difference between an education and an examination.

The "mere seat time" attack is now underway at the university level. Here, the drive is from virtual courses that cannot meet the hour-

requirements designed for classroom work. Universities do not use the Carnegie Unit, but do have a similar system. One credit hour of coursework is awarded for a lecture course that meets one hour a week for a semester; labs and "clinical" have to meet two or three hours a week for a college credit hour. A college credit is supposed to have a minimum of 15 contact hours. And teacher workshops are not supposed to award more than one credit per week. These restrictions are violated regularly. Virtual schools are eager to eliminate the seat time requirements in a headlong rush toward pay-your-money, take-your-test, get-your-degree. Oh, and many award college credits for life experiences, too.

The irony is that seat time, in a class under a good teacher, with passing scores on that teacher's internal tests, is the only measure that correlate with successful performance after the school.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

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