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[Editor's Note: The following are greetings received by May 1, 2012 and read at the celebration of the 15th Anniversary of the print edition of *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* by Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben released on May 1, 1997.]

Greetings on the 15th Anniversary of the Print Edition of Netizens

1) From San Francisco, California

Dear Jay and Ronda:

I clearly remember the time when you both shared with Larry and me the concept of Netizens and the scope of the Netizen book. I was intrigued because it was so different, and Larry was immediately captivated by what he called the 'universality of the concept'.

The three of you actually started a movement that has circled the globe! Think about that. So few of us ever make a contribution of that magnitude. As is often recorded over time, the originators don't always

get the credit for the best of ideas...although personal credit was not ever high on your agenda. You have the knowledge that your ideas indeed have caught hold and are being replicated in many ways across the world, improving communication in society and challenging old parameters.

I congratulate you on your achievement!

With respect and love, Margaret

2) From a Japanese Network activist who accompanied Michael in 1995 when Michael was invited to Japan

Dear Jay,

Thank you for your kind invitation.

I am doing fine, was asked to give a talk in India a few weeks ago on “Netizen” at the Internet Governance related conference and mentioned about Michael and the Book, remembering you all.

I have cced this to Prof. Kumon and also Ms. Chika Sekine who met Michael at the Hypernet conference back in '95, I believe, when we invited Michael.

Will try to send some words.

Best, Izumi

Later Izumi sent this greeting: “Netizen” is really a special term for us, in the mid '90s when we found the Internet, I felt “this is it.” The term Netizen very much symbolizes what we have been looking for – an active, free-spirited being, no specialist, crossing the border of cultures, states and minds on the planet. We owe a lot to people who coined this term and nurtured the concept. Thank you,

3) From the Chairperson of the Internet Society of China

Dear Jay,

Netizens in China are happy to catch the opportunity of Internet age to participate and improve themselves from the participation. It's a great

historical process for the Chinese Nation!

This is what I'd write in honor of the 15 anniversary of the book "Netizen."

Wish you and Ronda have a nice gathering with friends.

Qiheng

4) From an Internet research scholar in France

Dear Jay, Dear Ronda,

Thank you for your message! I was very happy to read about the luncheon you're organizing to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the publication of Netizens, and if I had been in New York, it would have been a pleasure to participate. So here's my small contribution to the event:

Sixteen years ago, I started working toward a Ph.D. on the political uses of the Internet at University Paris 7. At the time, in France, few people were connected to the Net outside universities, and I felt the need to explain the origins of the network. But where was I to find the books? Remember 1996: no Amazon, no Google, and buying a book overseas meant a lengthy mail-order process, often taking over a month. So you can imagine my joy when I discovered Netizens, available online on the University of Columbia's server, and for free, too! It was truly amazing to me, and the very fact of finding it got me thinking about the gift economy of the internet. Netizens is a landmark study from which I learned and quoted at length. Its worldwide readership testifies to its importance in the field of Internet studies.

[I think I first came across Netizens as a posting in one of the Usenet newsgroups I was following at the time (uspolitics, if I remember correctly). I was so happy to have found it that I printed out entire chapters :-)]

Happy celebration, and all the best from Vivian

5) From Berlin, Germany

From me too, of course...the book was a real milestone...we all also

remember Michael fondly, of course....

Ron

6) From Bloomfield Hills Michigan

Dear Ronda and Jay,

We thank you for your invitation to the luncheon, and are sorry that geography prevents us from being there. Don't forget to put a blurb in your local papers about the anniversary to get a little publicity. The Netizen book was assigned to Tom in an Information Technology class at the University of Michigan. The professor believed that the internet would be a universal vehicle of trading ideas, and of course she was right.

Congratulations that your book is still as relevant as it was 15 years ago. We are certain that this ceremony is greeted as enthusiastically as the original event.

Best wishes, Tom and Olga

7) From Oita, Beppu Bay Japan

(15th Anniversary of the hardcover book Netizens Celebration)

My dear old memory of Michael Hauben

In 1995 April, I heard that Mr. Michael Hauben, the inventor of the word "Netizens," was scheduled to visit Oita, a small local city in southwest part of Japan. I was very excited and decided to welcome him. A boyish-looking young man who has just grown up to an adult appeared through the conference room door and said hello. It was Mr. Michael Hauben from the USA.

First, I had sent him a welcome message through the E-mail saying please come to Oita Japan. Michael kindly checked the Internet in advance to learn what I was and what I was interested in. He prepared "A little New York Cookbook" and presented it to me. I was really delighted to see the lovely, tiny book filled with beautiful illustrations of cookies and other simple foods. I picked up some of them and actually cooked them in home. I took the pictures of the dishes and posted to the Internet. Michel was delighted as well.

<http://www.coara.or.jp/~mieko/cheese.htm>

New York is my long-cherished city. In 1998, I sent him a message to visit NYC and finally could meet not only him but also his parents in the city. I carried his book *Netizens* Japanese version with me and asked him to put the author's message on it. I also visited his apartment and exchanged greetings. This was a great memory in my life.

I don't like to use the subjunctive mood if he were alive, but he had passed away too early, too young. I wish him to watch the developing Internet world and network citizens much and much more. If he were here, he would have invented another new concept of *Netizens*.

I highly value the memory of Michael Hauben and pay my respects to Michael's parents Jay and Ronda who strongly promote the *Netizenship* all around the world. I and my husband Ken are very proud of being the everlasting friends of Michael Hauben who is now smiling and silently watching us from Heaven. Yes, Michael lives forever in our hearts.

Mieko

8) From Shanghai China and for this year NYC

Netizens change the world, especially China. Thanks to the internet, we can make our voice now. That's what I want to say.

Hanting

9) From Beijing, China

It is an important celebration for the 15th anniversary of the book: *Netizens: On the History and Impact of the Usenet and the Internet*. I am very glad to give a greeting.

Netizens is a power of people. It is our unprecedented option to impact the style of society, more importantly, to create the ideal world existing in all the peoples' hearts around the world. Everyone who uses the internet to make our world better, especially the pioneer who discovered the *Netizen's* story, turned the *Netizen* from a rhetoric word

to a new media, new life and new power. I want to give my honor and respect for them, I know Michael is one of them. I want to thank him, and I also will do my best to continue this job without salary, only with my conscience and responsibility.

Yunlong

10) From a Senior IT Professor, Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania

Dears Ronda and Jay,

I am very happy that this seminal and beloved book is now a “surprisingly mature teenager” and I greet from all my heart the initiative to pay tribute to the book itself and to its authors. Moreover, I think that the message is as important as it was from the very beginning, I am proud to be a virtual participant now at the Anniversary as well as an enthusiast reader 14 years ago (when I translated the key concept of Netizen), and I look forward to similar influential messages. All the best, Boldur

11) From a Professor in Political Science, Waseda University, Japan
Congratulation of the 15 years of your book on “Netizens.”

The word “Netizen “ became popular now in Asia. My “Global Netizen College” in Japanese had about 1.5 million accesses,

<http://www.ff.ijj4u.or.jp/~katote/Home.shtml>

<http://www.ff.ijj4u.or.jp/~katote/exchange.html>

and there are over 2.5 million web sites which use the Japanese word “Netizen” by Google search.

In South Korea, Netizen is one of the most popular words for their communication, like “netizenship,” “netizen vote” or even “netizen revolution.”

In China, the biggest internet country in the world, made the new word “Netizens” in Chinese Wikipedia, as Ms. Ronda Hauben reported in detail in “China in the Era of the Netizen.”

<http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/> (This page links to the netbook and to

Michael's netbook page)

http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2010/02/14/china_in_the_era_of_the_netizen/

Thus, we might be proud of our tasks as a pioneer of the “Rights of Netizens” <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/netizen-rights.txt>

I hope your further activity for the freedom of expression and your good health.

Yours, Tetsuro

12) From Berlin Germany

Dear Jay and Ronda,

Wendy and I congratulate you to the 15th anniversary of _Netizens_.

The tools used by netizens have evolved enormously over the course of time. Electronic communication has developed from bulletin boards through mail lists and Usenet, on through Web-based forums and text messaging, and now on to Facebook and Twitter. Some of the older modes of communication are still in use; others have, by and large, fallen by the wayside. And it remains to be seen how the commercial aspects of the newer forms will play out, as well as how attempts by governments around the world to regulate and control Internet communications will affect our usage of electronic media.

Certainly these tools have been used to advance political goals (both admirable and, sometimes, less admirable), and I am sure others will want to say more about this topic.

From my perspective, electronic communications have also been an essential tool allowing me to communicate with others who share my involvement in a programming language called Max/MSP. This is a system relatively few people are aware of outside of the fields of computer music and digital audio production. Indeed, it was originally known primarily only in a handful of universities and research centers studying acoustics and electronic music. The power of Internet communication is that it has allowed people, spread extremely sparsely around the world, to form an intensely supportive community. We have shared knowledge, helped each other solve problems, spread news of exciting

projects and even professional work opportunities. And this vital community has continually provided a platform for more people to become engaged, from new users of Max/MSP struggling with their first projects through to highly experienced users and the original developers of this software tool. And, as this community has grown, so we are now seeing Max/MSP being used to shape sound in radio and television broadcasts, theaters, even by commercial sound design for leading international enterprises. The chances are that something you recently heard – be it the ‘snap’ of some digital camera, sound effects on a television program or on stage, or a hit record on the radio – was shaped with Max/MSP. I was recently involved in a project to develop ways of allowing children with special needs, particularly extreme physical disabilities, to actively participate in music making. This would not have been possible without the software tool

Max/MSP, but it would also not have been possible without the dissemination of knowledge about this software facilitated by netizenship.

Wendy and I wish Jay and Ronda continued success in their work with actively encouraging netizens to form new activities. We sincerely hope that more and more of these will be forces for betterment – socially, scientifically, artistically, and politically – around the world.

With all best regards, Peter and Wendy

13) From the Secretary General of the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy Seoul, South Korea

Dear Ronda and Jay,

Congratulation on the 15th anniversary of the release of “Netizen.” Nowadays, Netizens in the world are playing a crucial role for changing the world. Communication on line with internet has been helping participatory democracy to develop.

Thank your family for excellent researches and activities in promoting participatory democracy.

Best regards, Taeho

14) From Yaoundé, Cameroon (West Africa) 2009

Dear Ronda,

I am happy to be in contact with an author I did appreciate and lengthily quoted in an important paper. As an anthropologist, I could only use a limited aspect of your research. I do hope I will learn more from you as far as connecting people around the world is concerned. In the MOST program, the concern is the linkage between research and public policy, i.e., scientific results and decision making. Netizenship is another scale of linkage among the people around the world. Netizenship is therefore a key point to raise and to work on, precisely as the world is going as liberal as global. I must however tell you how inspiring your book was to me for that specific point.

Lets us keep in contact. And please, extend my regards to your close friends or collaborators.

Best wishes, Charly

15) From Piscataway, New Jersey

The most striking thing to me about Netizens is that it seemed to predict how the internet could be used. When the book was written, the internet was not part of the mainstream in the way it is now. There were online communities, and it seems that there was a togetherness and an openness online, which helped inspire Michael's ideas. But maybe those communities were more limited at the time, simply because there were not as many internet users. Their impact was harder to see in the world. Recently, we have been seeing the internet used as a tool by movements like the revolutionaries in Egypt and the Occupy movement here.

With the internet's widespread use there comes conflicts. There have been debates over net neutrality, and in general, it seems to be more and more commercialized. But also with such wide use, and because it still does have an openness, it can be a very effective tool for democratic movements.

Mitchell

16) Anonymous:

“Netizens around the world stand with you now”

Netizens and Communication: A new Paradigm

by Ronda Hauben

[Note: This is a slightly edited version of a talk presented on May 1, 2012 at a small celebration in honor of the 15th Anniversary of the publication of the print edition of the book *Netizens*]

I. – Looking Back

Fifteen years ago on May 1, 1997, the print edition of *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* was published in English. Later that year, in October, a Japanese translation of the book was published. Today we are celebrating the occasion of the 15th Anniversary of this event.

In honor of this occasion I want to both look back and look forward toward trying to assess the significance of the book and of Michael Hauben’s discovery of the emergence of the netizen. I want to briefly look at what has happened in the interim of these 15 years toward trying to understand what new advance this development makes possible.

By the early 1990s, Michael recognized that the Internet was a significant new development and that it would have an impact on our world. He was curious about what that impact would be and what could help it to have a beneficial impact.

The book was compiled from a series of articles written by Michael and by me which were posted on the Net as they were written and which sometimes led to substantial comments and discussion.

The most important article in the book was clearly Michael’s article,

“The Net and Netizens: the Impact the Net Has on People’s Lives.”

Michael opened the article with the prophetic words, which appeared online first in 1993: “Welcome to the 21st Century. You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen) and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. You consider everyone as your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually, you live next door to every other single Netizen in the world. Geographical separation is replaced by existence in the same virtual space.”

[*Netizens*, Chapter 1, p. 3]

Michael goes on to explain that what he is predicting is not yet the reality. In fact many people around the world were just becoming connected to the Internet during the period in which these words were written and posted on various different networks that existed at the time.

But now fifteen years after the publication of the print edition of *Netizens*, this description is very much the reality for our time and for many it is hard to remember or understand the world without the Net.

Similarly, in his articles that are collected in the *Netizens* book, Michael looked at the pioneering vision that gave birth to the Internet, he looked at the role of computer science in the building of the ARPAnet network, at the potential impact that the Net and Netizen would have on politics, on journalism, and on the revolution in ideas that the Net and Netizen would bring about, comparing this to the advance brought about by the printing press. The last chapter of the book is an article Michael wrote early on about the need for a watchdog function over government in order to make democracy possible.

By the time the book was published in a print edition, it had been freely available online for three years. This was a period when the U.S. government was determined to change the nature of the Net from the public and scientific infrastructure that had been built with public and educational funds around the world to a commercially driven entity. While there were people online at the time promoting the privatization and commercialization of the Internet, the concept of netizen was embraced by others, by many who supported the public and collaborative nature of the Internet and who wanted this to grow and flourish.

The article “The Net and Netizens” grew out of a research project that Michael had done for a class at Columbia University in Computer Ethics. Michael was interested in the impact of the Net and so he formulated several questions and sent them out online. This was a pioneering project at the time and the results he got back helped to establish the fact that the Net was having an important impact on a number of people’s lives.

Michael put together the results of his research in the article “The Net and Netizens” and posted it online. This helped the concept of netizen to spread and to be embraced around the world. The netizen, it is important to clarify, was not intended to describe every net user. Rather netizen was the word to describe those on the Net who took up to support the public and collaborative nature of the Net and to help it to grow and flourish. Netizens at the time often had the hope that their efforts online would be helpful toward creating a better world.

Describing this experience in a speech he gave in Japan and which subsequently became the preface to the *Netizens* book, Michael explained: “In conducting research five years ago online to determine people’s uses of the global computer communications network, I became aware that there was a new social institution, an electronic commons, developing. It was exciting to explore this new social institution. Others online shared this excitement. I discovered from those who wrote me that the people I was writing about were citizens of the Net or Netizens.” [Netizens, Preface, p. ix]

Michael’s work which is included in the book and the subsequent work he did recognized the advance made possible by the Internet and the emergence of the Netizen.

The book is not only about what is wrong with the old politics, or media, but more importantly, the implications for the emergence of new developments, of a new politics, of a new form of citizenship, and of what Michael called the “poor man’s version of the mass media.” He focused on what was new or emerging and recognized the promise for the future represented by what was only at the time in an early stage of development.

For example, Michael recognized that the collaborative contributions for a new media would far exceed what the old media had

achieved. “As people continue to connect to Usenet and other discussion forums, the collective population will contribute back to the human community this new form of news,” he wrote. [*Netizens*, Chapter 13, p. 233]

In order to consider the impact of Michael’s work and of the publication of the book, both in its online form and in the print edition, I want to look at some of the implications of what has been written since about netizens.

II. – Mark Poster on the Implications of the Concept of Netizen

One interesting example is in a book on the impact of the Internet and globalization by Mark Poster, a media theorist. The book’s title is *Information Please*. The book was published in 2006. While Poster doesn’t make any explicit reference to the book *Netizens* he finds the concept he has seen used online to be an important one. He offers some theoretical discussion on the use of the “netizen” concept.

Referring to the concept of citizen, Poster is interested in the relationship of the citizen to government, and in the empowering of the citizen to be able to affect the actions of one’s government. He considers the “Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen” as a monument from the French Revolution of 1789. He explains that the idea of the Rights of Man was one effort to empower people to deal with governments. But this was not adequate and the concept of the rights of the citizen, he proposes, was an important addition.

“Human rights and citizenship,” he writes, “are tied together and reinforce each other in the battle against the ruling classes.” [*Information Please*, p. 68] He proposes that “these rights are ensured by their inscription in constitutions that found governments and they persist in their association with those governments as the ground of political authority.”[*Ibid.*, p. 68]

But with the coming of what he calls the age of globalization, Poster wonders if the concept “citizen” can continue to signify democracy. He wonders if the concept is up to the task.

“The conditions of globalization and networked media,” he writes,

present a new situation “in which the human is recast and along with it the citizen.” [Ibid., p.70] “The deepening of globalization processes strips the citizen of power,” he writes. “As economic processes become globalized, the nation-state loses its ability to protect its population. The citizen thereby loses her ability to elect leaders who effectively pursue her interests.” [Ibid., p. 71]

In this situation, “the figure of the citizen is placed in a defensive position.” [Ibid.] There is a need, however, to find instead of a defensive position, an offensive one.

Also, he is interested in the media and its role in this new paradigm. “We need to examine the role of the media in globalizing practices that construct new subjects,” Poster writes. “We need especially to examine those media that cross national boundaries and to inquire if they form or may form the basis for a new set of political relations.” [Ibid., p. 77]

In this context, for the new media, “the important questions, rather are these,” he proposes: “Can the new media promote the construction of new political forms not tied to historical, territorial powers? What are the characteristics of new media that promote new political relations and new political subjects? How can these be furthered or enhanced by political action?” [Ibid., p. 78]

“In contrast to the citizen of the nation,” he notices, the name often given to the political subject constituted on the Net is “netizen.” While Poster makes it seem that the consciousness among some online of themselves as “netizens” just appeared online spontaneously, this is not accurate.

Before Michael’s work, netizen as a concept was rarely if ever referred to. The paper “The Net and Netizens” introduced and developed the concept of “netizen.” This paper was widely circulated online. Gradually the use of the concept of netizen became increasingly common. Michael’s work was a process of doing research online, summarizing the research, analyzing it and then putting the research back online, and of people embracing it. This was the process by which the foundation for the concept of “netizen” was established.

Considering this background, the observations that Poster makes of how the concept of “netizen” is used online represents recognition of the significant role for the netizen in the future development of the body

politic. “The netizen,” Poster writes, “might be the formative figure in a new kind of political relation, one that shares allegiance to the nation with allegiance to the Net and to the planetary political spaces it inaugurates.” [Ibid., p. 78]

These new phenomena, Poster concludes, “will likely change the relation of forces around the globe. In such an eventuality, the figure of the netizen might serve as a critical concept in the politics of democratization.” [Ibid., p. 83]

III. – The Era of the Netizen

While Poster characterizes our period as the age of globalization, I want to offer a different view. I want to propose that we are in an era demarcated by the creation of the Internet and the emergence of the netizen. A more accurate characterization of this period is as the “Era of the Netizen.”

The years since the publication of the book *Netizens* have been marked by many interesting developments that have been made possible by the growth and development of the Internet and the spread of netizens around the world. I don’t have the time to go into these today but I will refer to a few examples to give a flavor of the kind of developments I am referring to.

A recent article by Vinay Kamat in the Reader’s Opinion section of the *Times of India* referred to something I had written. Quoting my article, the *Times of India* article said, “Not only is the Internet a laboratory for democracy, but the scale of participation and contribution is unprecedented. Online discussion makes it possible for netizens to become active individuals and group actors in social and public affairs. The Internet makes it possible for netizens to speak out independently of institutions or officials.” [See “We are looking at the Fifth Estate,” by Vinay Kamat, Reader’s Opinion, *Times of India*, December 16, 2011, p. 2.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/opinion/edit-page/We-are-looking-at-the-fifth-estate/opinions/11133662.cms>. The quote is taken from, *The Rise of Netizen Democracy: A Case Study of Netizens’ Impact on Democracy in South Korea* by Ronda Hauben. For the URL, see:

<http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/other/misc/korean-democracy.txt>]

Kamat points to the growing number of netizens in China and India and the large proportion of the population in South Korea who are connected to the Internet. “Will it evolve into a fifth estate?” the article asks, contrasting netizens’ discussion online with the power of the 4th estate, i.e., the mainstream media.

“Will social and political discussion in social media grow into deliberation?” asks Kamat. “Will opinions expressed be merely ‘rabble rousing’ or will they be ‘reflective’ instead of ‘impulsive’?”

One must recognize, the article explains, the new situation online and the fact that it is important to understand the nature of this new media and not merely look at it through the lens of the old media. What is the nature of this new media and how does it differ from the old? This is an important area for further research and discussion.

IV. – Looking for a Model

While I was in South Korea in 2008, a friend asked if there is a model for democracy that could be helpful for South Korea – like in some country perhaps in Scandinavia. Thinking about the question I realized it was more complex than it seemed on the surface.

What I realized is that it isn’t that one can take a model from the period before the Internet, from before the emergence of the netizen. It is instead necessary that models for a more democratic society or nation in our times be models that include netizen participation in the society. Both South Korea and China are places where the role of netizens is important in building more democratic structures for the society. South Korea appears to be the most advanced in grassroots efforts to create examples of netizen forms for a more participatory decision making process.¹ But China is also a place where there are significant developments because of the Internet and netizens.²

In China there have been a large number of issues that netizens have taken up online which have then had an impact on the mainstream media and where the online discussion has helped to bring about a change in government policy.

In looking for other models to learn from, however, I also realized that there is another relevant area of development. This is the actual

process of building the Net, a prototype which is helpful to consider when seeking to understand the nature and particularity of the evolving new models for development and participation represented in the Era of the Netizen.³

V. – Nerves of Government

In his article comparing the impact of the Net with the important impact the printing press had on society, Michael wrote: “The Net has opened a channel for talking to the whole world to an even wider set of people than did printed books.” [*Netizens*, Chapter 16, p. 299]

In my presentation today I want to focus a bit on the significance of this characteristic, on the notion that the Net has opened a communication channel available to a wide set of people.

In his study of the Net and Netizen, Michael recognized the new that was emerging. In trying to understand what impact the Net was having and would have on society, he also kept in mind that the technical processes of building the Net were important.

In order to have a conceptual framework to understand what these technical processes are, I recommend the book by Karl Deutsch titled, *The Nerves of Government*.

In the preface to his book, Deutsch writes: “This book suggests that it might be preferable to look upon government somewhat less as a problem of power and somewhat more as a problem of steering; and it tries to show that steering is decisively a matter of communication.” [*Nerves of Government*, p. xxvii]

To look at the question of government not as a problem of power, or of democracy, but as one of steering, of communication, I want to propose is a fundamental paradigm shift.

What is the difference?

While power has to do with force, with the ability to exert force on something so as to affect its direction and action, democracy has to do with the participation and effect of people on the decisions made for society. Steering and communication, however, are related to the process of the transmission of a signal through a channel. The communication process is one related to whether a signal is transmitted in a manner that distorts the signal or whether it is possible to transmit the signal

accurately. The communication process and the steering that it makes possible through feedback mechanisms are an underlying framework to consider in seeking to understand what Deutsch calls the “Nerves of Government.”

According to Deutsch, a nation can be looked at as a self steering communication system of a certain kind and the messages that are used to steer it are transmitted by certain channels.

I want to propose that some of the important challenges of our times relate to the exposure of the distortions of the information being spread. For example, the misrepresentations by the mainstream media about what is happening in Libya and Syria.³ The creation and dissemination of channels of communication that make possible “the essential two way flow of information” are essential for the functioning of an autonomous learning organization, which is the form Deutsch proposes for a well functioning system.

To look at this phenomenon in a more practical way, I want to offer some considerations raised in a speech given to honor a Philippine librarian, a speech given by Zosio Lee. Lee refers to the kind of information that is transmitted as essential to the well being of a society. In considering the impact of netizens and the form of information that is being transmitted, Lee asks the question, “How do we detect if we are being manipulated or deceived?” [“Truthfulness and the Information Revolution” *JPL* 31 (2011), p. 105]

The importance of this question, he explains, is that, “We would not have survived for so long if all the information we needed to make valid judgments were all false or unreliable.” [Ibid.] Also, he proposes that “information has to be processed and discussed for it to acquire full meaning and significance.” [Ibid., p. 106]

“When information is free, available and truthful, we are better able to make appropriate judgments, including whether existing governments fulfill their mandate to govern for the benefit of the people,” Lee writes. [Ibid., p. 108]

In his article “The Computer as a Democratizer” Michael similarly explores the need for accurate information about how government is functioning. He writes, “Without information being available to them, the people may elect candidates as bad as or worse than the incumbents.

Therefore, there is a need to prevent government from censoring the information available to people.” [*Netizens*, p. Chapter 18, p. 316]

Michael adds that, “The public needs accurate information as to how their representatives are fulfilling their role. Once these representatives have abused their power, the principles established by Paine and Mill require that the public have the ability to replace the abusers.” [Ibid., p. 317]

Channels of accurate communication are critical in order to share the information needed to determine the nature of one’s government.⁴

While in general I have focused on the implications of the concept of Netizen that have emerged in the decade and a half since the publication of the print edition of the book, it is also important to realize that not everyone is friendly to the concept of Netizen. An article in the online newsfeed section of *Time* magazine proposed that the word netizen should be banished from the media.

Katy Steinmetz, who does an online column for *Time* claimed, “The word has been around for almost three decades ([sic] it is less than two decades-ed), but the likes of the *Los Angeles Times* were using it as recently as last month. Perhaps it’s time to give it a rest...”

In the same article, she proposed to banish “occupy” and “# [the hashtag].” [See “POLL: What Words Should Be Banished in 2012? NewsFeed Time.com,” *Time* magazine, January 11, 2012.

<http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/01/11/poll-what-word-should-be-banished-in-2012/>]

The following week she acknowledges that there is very little sentiment to ban the word netizen.⁵

VI. – Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to point to an article in a blog at the Foreign Policy Association website which has the title: “Institutions and New World ‘Netizens’: Act 1”

The author, Oliver Barrett, reminds his readers of a quote from Mohandas Gandhi: “First They Ignore You – Then They Ridicule You – Then They Fight You – Then You Win”

Barrett asks, “Will technology fundamentally change the relationship between the nation state and citizens? He asks if Net connected

citizens are “a threat or opportunity for government?”

In response to this question, he writes, “But I am not convinced that government officials, even in industrialized countries, are cognizant of how technological innovations like social media have forever robbed them of their positions as trusted sources of timely and legitimate information.... I dare say that netizens have started to short-circuit the politico-corporate communications wiring, raising the political and social justice consciousness of the hyper-connected citizen in a way that might not be in the interest of the governing classes.”

“How will governments will respond to this situation?” he asks.⁶

“I look forward to witnessing how Act 2 of Revolution 2.0 will unfold,” he concludes.

Barrett focuses on the opinions of those in government. Instead I propose that the important challenge is for Netizens. Netizens need to understand the conceptual nature of the information and communication changes represented by the Era of the Netizen so they will be able to successfully meet the new challenges these represent for our society.⁷

Notes

1. In South Korea there are many interesting examples of new organizational forms or events created by netizens. For example Nosamo combined the model of an online Fan club and off line gathering of supporters who worked to get Roh Moo-hyun elected as President in South Korea in 2002. Also, *OhmyNews*, an online newspaper, helped to make the election of Roh Moo-hyun possible in 2002.

Science mailing lists and discussion networks contributed to by netizens helped to expose the fraudulent scientific work of a leading South Korean scientist.

In 2008 there were 106 days of candlelight demonstrations contributed to by people online and off to protest the South Korean government’s adoption of a weakened set of regulations about the import of poorly inspected U.S. beef into South Korea. The debate on June 10-11 over the form the demonstration should take involved both online and offline discussion and demonstrated the generative nature of serious communication. See for example, Ronda Hauben, “On Grassroots Journalism and Participatory Democracy” http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/other/netizens_draft.pdf

2. Some examples include the Anti-CNN web site that was set up to counter the inaccurate press reports in the western media about the riot in Tibet, the murder case

of a Chinese waitress who killed a Communist Party official in self defense, the case of the Chongqing Nail house and the online discussion about the issues involved. See for example, Ronda Hauben, “China in the Era of the Netizen”
http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2010/02/14/china_in_the_era_of_the_netizen/

3. See for example “Libya, the UN and Netizen Journalism,” *The Amateur Computerist*, Vol. 21, no. 1, Winter 2012.
http://www.ais.org/~jrj/acn/Back_Issues/Back_Issues%5b2011-2015%5d/ACn21-1.pdf

Jay Hauben, “On the 15th Anniversary of Netizens: Netizens Expose Distortions and Fabrications”
http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Book_Anniversary/presentation_2.doc

4. As Michael explains in *Netizens*:
“Thomas Paine, in *The Rights of Man*, describes a fundamental principle of democracy. Paine writes, “that the right of altering the government was a national right, and not a right of the government.” (*Netizens*, Chapter 18, p. 316)

5. Katy Steinmetz, “Wednesdays Words: Readers’ Choice for Banned Words of 2012 and More,” *Time Newsfeed*, January 18, 2012.
<http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/01/18/wednesday-words-readers-choice-for-banished-word-of-2012-and-more/>

6. “Will the officials that govern the modern nation state engage their respective societies in meaningful ways, or will they continue to hide their heads in the sand? From what I’ve learned from history and the very erudite Mohandas Gandhi – I think I know the answer.” Oliver Barrett
[http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2012/01/12/institutions-and-new-world-netizens-act-1/\(4/25/2012\)](http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2012/01/12/institutions-and-new-world-netizens-act-1/(4/25/2012))

7. See for example: Ronda Hauben, “The Internet Model of Socio-Economic Development and the Emergence of the Netizen”
http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2010/11/02/the_internet_model_of_socio-economic_development_and_the_emergence_of_the_netizen/

Ronda Hauben, “In Cheonan Dispute UN Security Council Acts in Accord with UN Charter”
http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2010/09/05/in_cheonan_dispute_un_security_council_discovers_un_charter/

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Katy Steinmetz, "Wednesdays Words: Readers' Choice for Banned Words of 2012 and More," *Time Newsfeed*, January 18, 2012.

<http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/01/18/wednesday-words-readers-choice-for-banished-word-of-2012-and-more/>

On the 15th Anniversary of *Netizens*: Netizens Expose Distortions and Fabrications

by Jay Hauben

I chose for this presentation an example of netizen activity in China. But to be sure there is netizen active in virtually every society. I will share with you one case study based on a paper I wrote in 2008 (<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/j-paper.doc>). The case study is of the *Anti-cnn* website put online in April 2008. I will add an epilogue about the Syrian crisis.

I. Background

On March 14, 2008, Tibetan demonstrators in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region in China, turned violent. A Canadian tourist and the one or two foreign journalists who witnessed the situation put online photos, videos and descriptions documenting the ethnically targeted violence of the rioters against citizens and property.¹ That was even before the Chinese media started to report it. The Chinese media framed the story as violence against Han Chinese and Muslim Chinese fomented by the Tibetan government in exile. Much of the mainstream international media like BBC, VOA, and CNN framed the violence as the result of discriminatory Chinese rule and Chinese police brutality.

Wide anger was expressed by many Chinese aboard when they discovered that some of the media in the U.S., Germany, France, and the U.K., were using photos and videos from clashes between police and pro-Tibetan independence protestors not in China but in Nepal and India to support that media's claim of violence by Chinese police. A digital slide show that contained a narrated presentation of 11 mislabeled photos inappropriate for the articles with which they appeared spread widely in cyberspace in and outside China. You can see the slide show at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSQnK5FcKas>. It contains some of the photos that were put online to show the distortions and false narrative of many international mainstream media. Very crudely, the

major media used photos like theses to support their false story of Chinese police brutality. Until today there is no evidence of such police brutality in Lhasa in March 2008.

II. Anti-cnn

Within a few days of the appearance of the inaccurate reports, Rau Jin a recent Tsinghua University graduate launched the *Anti-cnn* website (<http://www.anti-cnn.com>). He explained that after being part of netizen anger and discussion, he wanted to “speak out our thoughts and let the westerners learn about the truth.”²

The top page of *Anti-cnn* featured articles, videos and photos documenting some of the alleged distortions in the coverage of the Tibet events. The website also had forum sections first in Chinese then also in English.

The organizers set as the goal of *Anti-cnn* to overcome media bias in the western media by fostering communication between Chinese netizens and netizens outside of China so that the people of the world and of China could have accurate knowledge about each other. They wrote on their website, “We are not against the western media, but against the lies and fabricated stories in the media.” *Anti-cnn* was chosen as the site name, one of the organizers, Qi Hanting said, “because CNN is the media superpower. It can do great damage so it must be watched and challenged when it is wrong.”³ But the site was not limited to countering errors in the reporting of CNN. It invited submissions that documented bias or misrepresentations of China in the global media.

Rau Jin quickly received from net users hundreds of offers of help to find examples of media distortions. He gathered a team of 40 volunteers to monitor the submissions for factualness and to limit emotional threads. Rau Jin and his group decided on some rules. Name-calling or attacks on individuals or groups were to be deleted. Emotional posts were not allowed to have follow-up comments.

Forum discussions were started on the topics: “Western Media Bias,” “The Facts of Tibet” and “Modern China.” In the first five days the site attracted 200,000 visits, many from outside of China. Over time serious threads contained debates between Han Chinese and both Westerners and Tibetan Chinese and Uyghur Chinese trying to show

each other who they were and where they differ or where they agree.

Many visitors from outside China posted on *Anti-cnn* their criticism of Chinese government media censorship. In the responses to such criticism, some Chinese posters acknowledged such censorship but argued it was easy to circumnavigate, that all societies have their systems of bias or censorship and that netizens everywhere must dare to think for themselves and get information from many sources. One netizen with the alias *kylin* wrote, "I can say free media works the same way as less-free media. So what's most important? The people I'd say –... If people dare to doubt, dare to think on their own, do not take whatever comes to them, then we'll have a clear mind, not easily be fooled. I can say, if such people exist, then should be Chinese... the least likely to be brainwashed, when have suffered from all those incidents, cultural revolution, plus a whole long history with all kinds of tricks."⁴

Often there are expressions of nationalist emotions in Chinese cyberspace, for example calls for boycotting Japanese or French products. After the riot in Lhasa, there was an upsurge of nationalist defense of China including on *Anti-cnn*. At least some moderators on *Anti-cnn* however were opponents of nationalism, arguing that it is a form of emotionalism and needs to be countered by rational discourse and the presentation of facts and an airing of all opinions. The moderators often answered Chinese nationalists with admonitions to "calm down and present facts." While nationalist sentiment and love of country and anger appear often on the *Anti-cnn* forums, the opportunity for a dialogue across national and ethnic barriers is an expression of the internationalism characteristic of netizens.

Chinese citizens in general know that the mainstream Chinese media have a long history as a controlled and propaganda press. On the other hand, there was a wide spread assumption among people in China that the mainstream international media like CNN are a more reliable source of information and alternative viewpoints. The widespread online exposure of distortions and bias in major examples of the international mainstream media called into question for many Chinese people their positive expectation about Western media. The exposures also attracted the attention of others who questioned whether the so called Western mainstream media is any less a propaganda or political media than the

Chinese mainstream media.

Over its first year, the *Anti-cnn* Web site had become a significant news portal. After a year there was a debate to determine its future. Some of the founders left. The site continued with separate forum sections in Chinese and English but became less focused than it was before on exposing media bias.

Today, the April Media Group founded by Rau Jin is a continuation of *Anti-cnn*. It has Chinese and English language websites both known as M4 (<http://www.m4.cn/>, <http://www.4thmedia.org/>). Recently M4 had its comment section closed while the Chinese government decided how it would deal with a political scandal of a big significance.

For me the special significance of *Anti-cnn* was that it took up the important task of a media watchdog, but especially a watchdog over the most powerful media like CNN and BBC. Michael argued in his article “The Computer as a Democratizer” for the crucial role in a society of a watchdog press. In every society, major sectors of the media serve the current holders of power. That there is an emerging media and journalism which tries to serve the whole society by watching and criticizing the abuses of those with power is an optimistic sign. The net users who launched *Anti-cnn* took for themselves a public and international mission, using the net to watch critically the main international media. In the process there was discussion and debate on important social and political questions. They and those from China and around the world who took up the exposures and discussion and debate are examples for me of netizens.

I want to add a short epilogue to the story of *Anti-cnn*. This is about Syria.

III. Epilogue

Some time in early March 2011, protest demonstrations in Dara’a in Southern Syria were given a violent component. On March 17 or 18th armed people maybe from within the demonstration attacked Syrian police, killing seven. Media reports said at least four other people were killed at that time.⁵ The Syrian state media framed the story as “armed gangs attacking security forces and public property.” Western and Gulf satellite media quickly framed the story that “the Syrian government is

killing its own people.”

This time there was from very early a massive use of videos and photos purporting to document the “crimes of the Syrian government,” not only in or on the Western and Gulf satellite media, but also on websites and Facebook and Youtube and with Tweeterd links. As in the case of Tibet, many net users realized that much of this so called documentation was suspicious. Using online search engines, original sources were found and posted online to prove that many supposed “crimes of the Syrian government” were distortions and fabrication. Often crimes were traced to the armed opposition itself.

I briefly did an online search on the phrase “Syria Distortions.” I found net users and groups in the U.S., Tunisia, Palestine and Syria and elsewhere who were able to show that many of the videos and photos were from many places other than Syria. At:

<http://tunisianquestfortruth.wordpress.com/2012/02/06/samples-of-media-distortion-of-facts-about-syria-1-fake-pictures/> is an example of what was found in photos by a group called *Uprooted Palestinians* (<http://uprootedpalestinians.blogspot.com/>) and posted on their own and on the *TunisiansQuestforTruth* Facebook pages and websites. Links were sent out as tweets as well. These photos then also appeared on many websites. The photos were found to be from the Civil War in Lebanon, from gang murders in Mexico, from Israeli atrocities in Palestine, rebel crimes in Libya, but they were all labeled as Syrian government atrocities. Some were found to be photos of mass demonstrations in support of the Syrian government doctored to claim these were in support of the armed uprising.

I found an ongoing online war between the fabricators and the exposers. The exposures often attract a set of comments supporting the effort to have an accurate narrative. But I have not yet found where the exposures have been turned into discussion forums as happened on *Anti-cnn*.

In my short search I also found the website Moon of Alabama likely in the U.S. (<http://www.moonofalabama.org/>). On that site a detailed exposure appeared when the U.S. Government distributed satellite photos claiming to show military shelling of Homs. Moon of Alabama looked at Google Maps and Google Earth satellite photos to demonstrate

for example that some of the satellite photos were of a Syrian military base not of shelling of Homs. Similarly the blogger argued each of the claims by the U.S. government about these photos was false. The same blog also viewed a video purported to be a one hour live video cast from the shelling of Homs. The blogger wrote a script to guide viewers so that the level of fabrication was apparent.

IV. Netizen Journalism

In addition to the research bloggers who find and expose fabrications and distortions, there is a growing number of journalists, websites and news sources which provided an alternative account and critique of the Western and Gulf state and media narrative about Syria. Among these are the Center for Research on Globalization, Voltairenet, Syria360, RT, Prensa Latina, to name a few. A serious analytic, research journalism with a public purpose is emerging which attempts to give a solid base so net users can arrive at an accurate understanding of crisis and situations like that in Syria. Ronda interprets such journalism as netizen journalism. Michael wrote that the net makes it possible for every netizen to be a journalist. For me, Michael's vision and the *Netizens* continue to be relevant and powerful as the net continues to empower people toward a greater participation in more and more aspects of their societies.

Notes

1. *Riot in Tibet: True face of western media* posted by dionysos615 on YouTube on March 19, 2008: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSQnK5FcKas>
 2. Quoted in *China Daily*, April 2, 2008:
http://www.chindaily.com.cn/china/2008-04/02/content_6587120_2.htm
 3. Interview with *Anti-cnn* webmaster Qi Hanting, April 19, 2008, translated from Chinese. See Ronda Hauben, "Netizens Defy Western Media Fictions of China"
http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=382523&rel_no=1
 4. <http://www.anti-cnn/forum/en/thread-2316-1-1.html>
 5. See, May 1, 2011, The Center for Research on Globalization in Canada video at: <http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=24576> and May 3, 2011, article at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=24591>
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My thinking on Netizens

In 1999, when I went to college, it was the first time for me to touch the internet. I still remember clearly the experience that day. I carefully got access into a website and browsed some news. Later I registered an e-mail address and sent my first e-mail. Afterwards I learned to chat online. The first time is always very fresh and exciting. But after, the excitement diminished, I thought that the internet did not change our lives as much as what was described by others. I still remember I told to my roommate of my disappointment. He was an amateur with the computer thinking that the internet could not do any more than e-mail and browsing news. I admitted that the internet did make our lives much more convenient and more fast than before, but it just substitutes for the role of newspapers, radios, and televisions. These inventions did not change the historical trail, neither did the internet. This was my opinion at that time.

In recent years, with the popularization of the internet, the internet was more and more necessary in our lives. I roughly spend a quarter of a day in internet. What is more important, we witness the power of the internet and social media in some big things, like the major railway crash in China, Arabic Spring, the Occupy Wall Street movement and so on. I gradually realize that I underestimated the impact of the internet before. I am not sure if the internet will change the trail of human history, but I am sure that the internet does change the structure and management of human society. Why? First, the internet gives us another spacious space. In the cyber space, the demarcation of nations, classes, parties, groups and professions becomes vague. Identities and status of people are not set by the society. Second, the internet gives us another source of power. This power is not less than the invention of the atomic bomb. But the internet is different from the atomic bomb. The latter can be monopolized by a few people. The former should be shared by everyone. Actually, the bigger the power is, the fewer people have the atomic weapons, while the bigger the power is, the more people share the internet. Each internet user is both a source and a holder of the power. With great power comes great responsibility. In tradition, a few

elites manage the society and make decisions. Now everyone can participate in the management and influence the decision-making process.

Let me go back to Michael and Ronda's book, *Netizens*. I have to admit the book is very visionary. It was not just because it foresaw the drastic social changes brought by the internet in early 1990s before I touched the internet, but what more important is that the book offers us a blueprint or a way for our future society based on the internet, that is the netizen.

What is the netizen? According to the Haubens' introduction to me, the netizen does not equate to the internet user. Only those internet users who abide by a set of moral norms and do good things are netizens. They imagine that the netizens would be the mainstream in the cyber society and it would give birth to a good and equal society in reality which would break away from the traditional minority-ruling-majority model. Marx and many Communists once tried to construct such a perfect society. They failed in practice. The internet and netizen probably provide a technological tool and a different way to realize the dream. This is our best wish.

However, we also should know it is a long way to the theory applying to the practice. The formation of the civil society in a real world tells us we cannot expect a netizen society would form very soon. Like the civil society is based on the rule of law, the netizen also should be based on a set of norms. But the formation of norms must be a free, open and voluntary process. Any government and organization should not make out such norms in the name of netizens, or the netizen society would repeat the tradition model.

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