Can the Digital Media Revolution Restore a Vital Balance within Civil Society and International Business?

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Abstract

Technology can outgrow its usefulness and become a monstrous threat to industrial and national interests, particularly where further innovation is concerned. Digital media technologies allow for greater expression through more effective simulation and prototyping of conceptual designs before moving into full production. The risk and danger associated with innovation on an industrial scale can be dramatically reduced where reality is simulated. The real motives for business success have to do with transformation, with making a difference, with leaving behind a legacy. Aspiring and achieving super ordinate goals, discovering meaning in our lives, has often been reflected in the narratives of traditional media. Now more accessible digital media technologies make it possible for individual and organizational aspirations to have a better chance at becoming realized.

Keywords: Technology, Innovation, Society, Digital Media, International Business

Introduction

One of mankind’s abiding nightmares, from Frankenstein onwards, is that mad scientists, sorcerers’ apprentices, robotic creatures crying, “exterminate!” and automata of every kind have robbed us of our humanity. Hephaestus, blacksmith to the gods, was the only Greek god who limped and limping is a primordial symptom of imperfection, of values somehow out of balance (Norman, 1981). Oedipus means “swollen foot”. He also limped, as did the wicked Captain Ahab in Moby Dick, madly pursuing the great white whale, and the murderous Richard the Third.

We do not believe that technologies are redemptive and that companies like DreamWorks will somehow rescue us from decline. But, the digital media revolution does offer us opportunities to set things right, to assert our humanity, our caring and our idealism. We suggest that this be seized upon and the fullest advantage taken. Many digital media technologies may now be considered as languages in themselves, crossing national boundaries and traditional forms of business communication. It is argued that unlike most other technologies that exaggerate parts of our human endowment at the expense of other parts and skew our cognition, digital media gives expression to the whole person so that technological communication and influence is potentially benign.
Literature Review

The literature review proceeds under various subheadings as follows. We look at the selective magnification of human resources under most technologies and argue that this distorts reality. We argue that digital media has the capacity to record personal, industrial and organizational wholeness and integrity. Its costs are falling rapidly so that business and ambitious individuals can use it to lead. It reflects our products, services and “lives in progress”. It has a reach far beyond mere entertainment to the growth of society and the economy. It is especially relevant to making the economy more innovative. Culture is importantly connected to how human beings play and simulate their problems. Digital media can play the role of a prototype for millions of possible innovations by envisioning alternative futures. Digital media appeals to the whole brain, both hemispheres and their functions.

Magnifying selective endowments

Most technologies magnify a small part of the human endowment and obscure the rest, so that writing is boosted by printing, but sidelines conversation. Printing machines encode our experience while relegating what they omit, the immediacy of human encounter. Computers ignore social context and celebrate numeracy, creating technocrats in their own image as ink cartridges replace the blood in our veins. The human-machine interface pushes us to the top of the abstraction ladder and human-to-human interaction suffers. TV turns us into couch potatoes and spreads the passivity of consumerism, locking us into our homes to be entertained as a mass audience. Even Facebook was created by an entrepreneur who, if The Social Network motion picture is to be believed, lacks all human graces to an extent matched only by Larry Summers as featured in Social Network, (Argetsinger, 2010). Facebook will not save us from over mechanization either, although it is nice to have human faces back in the equation (Hasday, 2012; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Digital media portray us whole

What can restore our humanity, our community, our idealism and our inspiration is a technology, which substantially has everything that most human beings have: sight, sound, movement, drama, intelligence, music, emotional range, information and experience. Digital media takes nothing out of the fullness of our endowment. It can be crass, of course, because sometimes we are so, but it amputates none of our human capacities and replicates them all. It can entertain us, educate us, memorialize us, interact with us and communicate what we have imagined to other people so they share our visionary experiences (Pfeffer, 2012).

Recent developments reminiscent of computers

An interesting thing has been happening to digital media since its inception. Levels of sophistication in pre-production, production and post-production, which were once the province of Hollywood specialists, are now available to the general public at a fraction of the cost and are substantially automated. Just as the personal computer could do almost everything the IBM mainframe had done years earlier, now much of the business of content
development has been simplified beyond imagining. We are literally the media directors of our own lives. Of course very few have the requisite skills, but these can be learned. The means to be our own impresarios are at hand. As Shakespeare put it, “All the world’s a stage. And all the men and women are merely players”. These emerging media technologies not only mediate vivid events between people, but also enable dramatic representations of their aspirations, their imaginings and their visions (Abelin, 2003).

Lives in progress

Digital media brings narrative back into our lives, the magic of storytelling and the process of transformation, which alone creates genuine wealth. It gives us Lives in Progress (White, 1952). It can capture our finest moments, our most moving utterances, and our most profound sentiments and actually immortalize them. When Humphrey Bogart rescues a young bride from a lecherous police chief, his artful manipulation touches the heart. This was the moment, December 1941, when America abandoned its isolationism and joined the war against fascism. It was an unforgettable watershed in history, the New World coming to the rescue of the old.

Beyond entertainment: Making America more innovative

But we totally underestimate the potential impact of digital media if we consign it only to the entertainment industry. Arguably there is too much entertainment today, too many people sitting on their bottoms in mortgaged properties, up to their eyes in debt. This economy needs more activity and less passivity, relatively more production and, so that we can afford consumption, more serious intent and less escapist fantasy with Rambo restoring our pride by re-fighting the Vietnam War.

So we want to underline what digital media could do for our innovation and productivity as a nation. In the first place it can vividly portray what is in the mind of the entrepreneur and the inventor. Michael Schrage has pointed out that upon the quality of the prototype, its detail and its subtlety, will the innovation of the final product depend (Schrage, 2000). If we build a physical replica of what the final product will look like, it gives us only its outward appearance and may be extremely expensive in itself and costly to change. In contrast 3D modeling, animation and simulation can examine the virtual product inside and outside and in cross-sections. It can show the product moving and in operation, its maintenance and repair, its impact on the environment and anticipated changes in customer behavior which might result (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). It would dramatize and glamorize the idea in the head of the initiator and be very much more likely to attract investors, customers, bankers, partners and enthusiastic employees. It boosts our imaginative capacities.

Writers like Tom Kelley (Kelley & Littman, 2001) and C. K. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) have pointed out that having an image of the product standing between you and the customer facilitates co-creation. Changes to the product can be made between you in ways that are inexpensive and flexible and the process of continuous improvement advocated by W. Edwards Deming (1982) can go forward apace using incredibly versatile models. Franz Johansson (2004) has pointed out the advantages of having a “virtual” model of what you are aiming for. New Zealand triumphed in the Americas Cup race by having a “phantom yacht” with all the best features of two competing prototypes. Every time one of the two yachts won they added the features responsible to...
the phantom craft. It mimics the theory of evolution in that even accidental features may be discovered and selected.

**The vital importance of play**

Digital media can remind us of the vital importance of *play* in human and animal culture (Huizinga, 1955). This has been well expounded by the celebrated anthropologist and social scientist, Gregory Bateson (1987). Many animal species including man learn by playing. Lion cubs, otters, tigers, feral dogs and cats in general learn of how to fight and even kill using non-violent play as a rehearsal. They will romp and chase each other with their claws retracted and their lips hanging over their teeth. When they “bare their fangs” playtime is over. They are serious and will cause injury. They could not survive in the wild without first learning a harmless way of predation.

It is similar with mankind. Theatre is a mark of civilization in which we “die” without dying “fight” without fighting and portray appalling events so that we may learn from these without actually suffering their consequences. When Medea murdered her own children to spite Jason her unfaithful husband, a great cathartic shudder ran around the Greek amphitheatre, where the audience sat shoulder touching shoulder and wives were included. This is what happens to your children’s lives when married couples quarrel! Perhaps you do not kill them physically but poison their hearts mentally. Note that this is more religion than entertainment, more mass psychotherapy than relaxation. But by
anticipating horror you avoid it, having witnessed gross crimes you resolve not to commit them, injustice on stage promotes justice around it (Thomson, 1941). Play is a civilizing process. Business itself is a non-lethal contest, a civilizing or contentious “game”.

A Whole-Brain technology

Digital media’s evolution into a whole brain medium

It is said we have two hemispheres of the brain (Sperry, 1964; Ornstein, 1972). The left-brain, like the computer, is abstract, numerate, literary, codified and dryly objective. Many would argue that digital media is right-brained. It is concrete, experiential, pictorial, dramatic and passionately subjective. But we disagree. Digital media has the capacity to stimulate the whole brain, like the corpus collosum, the bundle of nerves that joins the two brain hemispheres (Bogen, 1974). Digital media also uses machines that produce reliable outputs, but these are machines to which the ghosts of our humanity have returned and now inhabit. These are machines that are capable of presenting the very best of our human endowments. These are technologies that empower our ideas and give millions access to them.

Given the priceless competitive advantage of the English language spoken by countless people across the globe, could not America and Britain, already responsible for Hollywood and London’s theatre district, with more plays on in one night than the whole of Europe, become the world’s educators, mediators, instructors and facilitators, as well as entertainers? Science and art are also joined by this medium, just as world leadership is described and exemplified by it. Digital media can take a lead in the conquest of death itself. We can learn to live and speak now in a way that our children’s children and our students’ students will not only remember, but watch and hear repeatedly, if indeed we
have anything worth telling them and that no machine can provide! That will be up to us alone.

**Discussion: A boost to the meaning of work**

The latest financial crises should have reminded us that people work for **meaning**, not mainly for monetary incentives (Frankl, 1946). The idea that entrepreneurs “want to make money” is almost entirely without foundation. Were this so, they would need to have their heads examined since four out of five entrepreneurs suffer **losses** and a less certain way to enrich yourself is hard to conceive. Entrepreneurs have ideas and visions for which they are prepared to suffer great deprivation if necessary. Of course they **need** money to succeed, but this is not the same as being motivated by it. During our work together on a documentary at Harvard Business School, Professor Clayton Christensen commented that anyone attending a half-decent business school is going to make money more reliably than an entrepreneur (personal communication, August 15, 2009).

Building on Maslow’s theory of motivation, Frederick Herzberg’s (1966) motivation-hygiene theory explores job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. McClelland’s (1961) earlier study of achievement and motivation showed that monetary incentives make a difference only to low achievers. The high achievers achieve for the sake of accomplishment and did no better when financially rewarded. If we assume that innovative achievements are their own reward then many employees work for the intrinsic meaning of their work and its envisaged benefits to customers. If we succeeded in dramatizing this fact and persuaded employees that they were “on stage” pioneering new ways to satisfaction then the energies of millions could be mobilized. On one important occasion during the famous Hawthorne Experiment some working class American women found themselves to be taking part in an historical drama, as more and more distinguished visitors came to see the ever rising productivity in their experiment. The result was continuous improvement, together with soaring morale. They were no longer assembling telephone relays. They were **discovering how telephone relays could be better assembled**, (see Roethlisberger, Dickson, Wright, Pforzheimer & Western Electric Company, 1939). They had a super ordinate goal.

The problem with monetary incentives and grossly unequal pay is that someone must pay for this and increasingly it is the American middle class. Robert Reich (2011) has shown that only once before have incomes in the US been so unequal, in 1929 on the eve of the Great Depression! Those who work for meaning live in a world of abundance and of sharing and have “shared strategy” (Porter, 2011). As Romeo said to Juliet, “the more I give you the more I have”.

**A new kind of leadership**

The break-neck speed of growth in the People’s Republic of China, where monetary incentives are a fraction of what Americans earn, reveals that ever greater disparities of income do not work as supposed. Dick Fuld earned $500 million in the year before Lehman Brothers collapsed. But if employees truly work for meaning an entirely new style of leadership will emerge. The leader will be a storyteller, a film “star”, a hero, a seeker after new knowledge who offers his people historical opportunities to create new realities, all of which are recorded on film for posterity. People will work to make a difference, to hand something back to their society to enshrine their memories. It will be an era of
transformational leadership described by James McGregor Burns (1978), citing Roosevelt’s fireside chats to the nation. The leader transforms his followers, while the followers transform the leader and the nation achieves a new consciousness.

Digital media have the power to redefine achievement.

Since the rewards for success are cultural and psychological, digital media has the power to make heroes out of the people we most need and do so at a comparatively reasonable cost. It also has the power to expose greed and extravagance in the midst of hunger, want, and threats to the eco-system. When a camera points at the values we espouse we get a second chance.

Conclusions

Are America and the Anglo-Saxon nations in inexorable decline? Are we now addicted to consumerism and suckers for mass entertainment? Are we relapsing into sofas and the make-believe world of computer games? Not if we turn around our entertainment skills and aim for “edutainment”. We could become the winged messengers of the universe, the discoverers and the teachers of Best Practice. In a world of self-generating bodies of knowledge now driving international business, digital media can become the dendrites of a huge brain, the business of learning from each other with all the speed we can muster. America already leads the world in business scholarship. Making this available internationally could be the overture to a genuinely new Renaissance. Let the New World reach beyond the New Frontier, to the New Consciousness of how value is created.

Technologies tend to limp like Hephaestus, blacksmith to the gods and the only imperfect specimen. Technologies do this because they hugely magnify just one aspect of
the human endowment and so unbalance the whole. However some recent technologies are much broader and could help us to redress that balance rather than upset it. We refer especially to digital media technologies that include, sight, sound, movement, music, drama, narration, action, adventure and emotional depth. These restore our sense of wholeness.

What is especially valuable is the simulation of human experience, which can portray terrible outcomes while teaching us to avoid these in reality. Many animal species, including humans, learn by play, by pretending to chase, to fight and to compete until they perfect such skills. By engaging in mock combat they learn to kill without harming their own species. Human civilization is much advanced by theatre and later by film in which perilous situations are depicted and important lessons conveyed. We learn vicariously by sympathy at what is being portrayed.

Somewhat in the manner of mainframe computers, digital media have recently evolved beyond recognition, shrinking in cost and expanding in sophistication. So much has the technology developed that we can with sufficient skill become the media directors of our own lives and dramatise ourselves for posterity. But we seek to move beyond entertainment and the sedentary life of the couch potato. Digital Media could animate the ideas in the minds of entrepreneurs and win for innovators the investors, the customers, the employees and the community support needed for their success. New products can be shown in action, in impact, in repair and maintenance, in proper use, in cross-sections and inside out. We can show what they do to and for customers and the environment. These prototypes can link suppliers and customers in co-creation and be improved.

Brain research reveals that most computer technologies arouse the neo-cortex and the brain's left hemisphere, but digital media arouse the whole brain. Since the English language has often become integral to international business, digital media could amplify this advantage and become an exemplar of distance learning and spread internationally.

When we inquire as to why people work, the answer is for meaning in their lives, not for obscenely large rewards, which are becoming unaffordable. We achieve at what we most value and media have a great capacity to project those values. All civilizations are at the mercy of their creative minorities. This is a way of mobilizing them.

According to Arnold Toynbee (Toynbee & Caplan, 1972), every civilization rises and declines on the back of its creative minority. There may not be enough of us, but let us at least try. What we now have is the power to dramatize new visions worth championing, before and during the transformation of ideas into reality.

What we do is increasingly mediated by the technologies we use. These exaggerate one part of our human endowments and suppress other parts. This distorts our humanity so that like knives, forks and spoons we can only cut, poke and ladle what we find. In digital media, now dropping in price and greatly simplifying the production of visual drama, we have a medium, which at last does justice to the fullness of our human endowments. What parts of ourselves in what proportions is for us to decide. Bias may continue but we must blame ourselves for this, not our tools. We are enabled to define the meaning of our lives as never before, able to project our ideas forward in time to win adherents and to attract millions of dollars to innovative purposes.
References


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English Abstract

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Abstract

Technology can outgrow its usefulness and become a monstrous threat to industrial and national interests, particularly where further innovation is concerned. Digital media technologies allow for greater expression through more effective simulation and prototyping of conceptual designs before moving into full production. The risk and danger associated with innovation on an industrial scale can be dramatically reduced where reality is simulated. The real motives for business success have to do with transformation, with making a difference, with leaving behind a legacy. Aspiring and achieving super ordinate goals, discovering meaning in our lives, has often been reflected in the narratives of traditional media. Now more accessible digital media technologies make it possible for individual and organizational aspirations to have a better chance at becoming realized.

Keywords: Technology, Innovation, Society, Digital Media, International Business
Can the Digital Media Revolution Restore a Vital Balance within Civil Society and International Business?

Est-ce que la révolution numérique des médias peut restaurer un équilibre entre la société civile et le commerce international?

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Résumé

La technologie peut dépasser son utilité et devenir une menace pour les intérêts industriels et nationaux, en particulier lorsque de nouvelles innovations sont concernées. Les technologies numériques de média permettent une plus grande expression par la simulation et un prototypage plus efficace des dessins conceptuels, avant de passer au stade de production. Le risque, et le danger, liés à l'innovation à l'échelle industrielle, peut considérablement être réduits lorsque la réalité est simulée. Les raisons réelles d'une réussite des entreprises sont reliées à la transformation, à faire une différence et à laisser derrière soi un héritage. Aspirer à et réaliser des super objectifs, découvrir un sens à nos vies, a été plus souvent pris en compte dans des récits des médias traditionnels. Maintenant que les technologies des médias numériques sont devenues plus accessibles, nos aspirations individuelles et organisationnelles ont une meilleure chance de se réaliser.

Mots-clés: technologie, l'innovation, la société, les médias numériques, commerce international

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German Abstract*
Can the Digital Media Revolution Restore a Vital Balance within Civil Society and International Business?

Kann die digitale Medienrevolution eine wesentliche Ausgeglichenheit innerhalb der Zivilgesellschaft und dem internationalen Business wiederherstellen?

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Keywords: Technologie, Innovation, Gesellschaft, digitale Medien, internationales Business

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Spanish Abstract*  
Can the Digital Media Revolution Restore a Vital Balance within Civil Society and International Business?

¿Puede la Revolución Digital Restaurar un Equilibrio Vital dentro de la Sociedad Civil y en los Negocios Internacionales?

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Resumen

La tecnología puede superar su utilidad y convertirse en una grave amenaza para los intereses industriales y nacionales, en particular en lo que concierne a la innovación. Las tecnologías de los medios digitales permiten una mayor expresión a través de la eficaz simulación y creación de prototipos de diseños conceptuales previamente a su producción. El riesgo y el peligro asociado con la innovación a escala industrial se pueden reducir drásticamente cuando se simula la realidad. Los verdaderos motivos para el éxito del negocio tienen que ver con la transformación, con la fabricación de una diferencia, con dejar un legado. Aspirando y alcanzando metas insospechadas, el descubrimiento de significado en nuestras vidas a menudo se ha reflejado en las narrativas de los medios de comunicación tradicionales. Ahora las tecnologías de los medios digitales más accesibles hacen posible que las aspiraciones individuales y organizacionales puedan tener una mejor oportunidad de convertirse en realidad.

Palabras Clave: Tecnología, Innovación, Sociedad, Medios Digitales, Negocio Internacional

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Arabic Abstract*
Can the Digital Media Revolution Restore a Vital Balance within Civil Society and International Business?

هل تستطيع ثورة الوسائط الرقمية استعادة التوازن الحيوي بين المجتمع المدني والتجارة الدولية؟

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الملخص

يمكن لمخاطر التكنولوجيا أن تنفوق على فوائدها وتصبح تهديداً كبيراً للمصالح الصناعية والوطنية. خصوصاً مع السعي المستمر لزيادة الابتكار. تنبيح تكنولوجيا الوسائط الرقمية المجال للمزيد من التعبير من خلال المحاكاة الفعالة ونماذج التصميم الفكرية ذات الفاعلية العالية قبل نقلها للتصنيع بشكل كامل. ويمكن الحد بشكل كبير من الخطر المرتبط بالابتكار على النطاق الصناعي عن طريق محاكاة الواقع. حيث تكمن الدوافع الحقيقية لنجاح الأعمال وراء التحول لحدثات فرق. وترك ارثاً كبيراً ورائه. عادة تعكس وسائل الإعلام التقليدية. الطموح اتجاه الأهداف العظيمة وتحقيقها، وتعكس مدى اكتشاف معنى حياتنا.

في الوقت الحالي مع سهولة الوصول لتكنولوجيا الوسائط الرقمية يمكن للتطبيقات الفردية والتنظيمية أن تحقق.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التكنولوجيا، الابتكار، المجتمع، الوسائط الرقمية، التجارة الدولية

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Can the Digital Media Revolution Restore a Vital Balance within Civil Society and International Business?

La rivoluzione digitale dei media può restaurare l’equilibrio vitale fra società civile e business internazionale?

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Abstract

La tecnologia può andare oltre la sua utilità e divenire una minaccia mostruosa agli interessi industriali e nazionali, in particolare per ciò che riguarda ulteriori sviluppi nell’innovazione. I media digitali consentono una maggiore espressività attraverso una maggiore capacità di simulazione e sviluppo di prototipi prima di passare ad un vera e propria piena produzione. I rischi e pericoli associati con l’innovazione possono essere considerevolmente ridotti nei casi in cui la realtà possa essere simulata. I reali motivi per il successo nel business hanno a che fare con il trasformare, fare la differenza, lasciare dietro di se un’eredità concettuale. Aspirare a, e raggiungere, obiettivi di livello più alto, scoprire significati nelle nostre vite, è stato spesso rispecchiato dai media tradizionali. Ora le sempre più accessibili tecnologie digitali dei media consentono alle aspirazioni sia di individui che organizzazioni di avere maggiori probabilità di realizzarsi.

Keywords: tecnologia, innovazione, società, media digitali, business internazionale

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