

Market Anarchism for Network Mutualism

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July 24th, 2014

Human communication systems offer incredible insight to the creative nature of human beings, spontaneous social order and emerging markets within our societies. For the first time in human history we are sharing ideas from the local to the global in scale. With the advent of the Internet, social media and growing social networks, communication costs are at an all time low. These falling communication costs, as at every time in our collective history, are allowing us to work around traditional power structures that have historically controlled the amount and type of information we receive. As the Internet is a mechanism for global communication, we are now cultivating ideas based on individual and collective interaction with people who hold similar interests.

The described collaborative nature of inclined labor in the freed market has far-reaching political and socioeconomic implications for our societies. Historical evidence suggests that social and cultural development are dependent upon active participation from people in their local communities (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). Emerging communication technologies and the spread (and ease of access to) information can lead to a transfer of authority from centralized institutions to neighborhood or community organizations (McCook 2000). Human communication systems play a fundamental role in the empowerment of all people and provide a wide range of benefits to communities (Wilcox 1996). Altruism is alive and well in the Internet age.

The collaborative nature of the Internet, the ease of access to information, and the development of local to global markets over the net are of particular interest to market anarchists. After all, what better place to work on a project with peers, or organize a rebellion? The Molinari Institute website defines market anarchism this way:

Market anarchism is the doctrine that the legislative, adjudicative, and protective functions unjustly and inefficiently monopolised by the coercive State should be entirely turned over to the voluntary, consensual forces of market society.

The market anarchist seeks differing and competing modes of social organization. Market anarchism maintains replacing the state with a decentralized society is desirable because of the feasibility of, and the liberating principles innate to, left-wing free market economics. What better example of voluntary social organization exists than the vast networks emerging on the Internet?

Important here is the concept of information ecology. Information ecology is a system of people, practices, values and technologies in a particular environment (Nardi & O'Day 1999) or

community. This idea of information ecology helps us better understand human communication systems and how information moves within them – how is information used, who needs certain types of information, who is impacted by access (or lack thereof) of information and what does this mean for our communities? As communication continues its decentralized evolution in the age of the Internet more stakeholders will take active roles in community development, empowering people like never before (Mehra 2009).

The online encyclopedia “Wikipedia,” for example, explicitly restricts corporations or governments from uploading information to its online content, instead allowing only individuals to add, remove or change content on the website (Kaplan 2010). Driving this collaborative effort is the idea that the labor of many individuals leads to better availability of information than any single person or actor could individually achieve (Fama 1970). The idea is that collaborative projects lead to more efficient markets. Collaborative projects enable the creation of information by interested users and are incredibly democratic.

A political example of this democratization is occurring right now in China. Guobin Yang (2003) notes that civil society and the Internet are dependent upon each other. The Internet facilitates the activities of a civil society by creating new markets for citizen participation. Civil society facilitates further development of the Internet by creating the social capital (citizens and citizen groups) for communication and interaction (Yang 2003). This co-evolution of the Internet and society has big implications for China’s model of government (even as the Chinese government attempts to control access to social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook), as Yang explains:

The co-evolution of the Internet and civil society means that political control of the Internet in China will have to take the form of control of civil society as well, and vice versa. Both options are open to the state, but the simultaneous control of the Internet and civil society will add to the difficulty and complexity of control. The co-evolutionary process also means that civil society development will facilitate the democratic uses of the Internet as much as the diffusion of the Internet will shape civil society. This scenario may have long-term consequences for the development of the Internet and civil society in China.

Many more examples of networked decentralization exist across the net.

Human beings are fond of organizing in groups and with new technology we are in the beginning phases of building a global market defined by collaborative social action. The Internet, information technology and falling communication costs provide easy-access to local/regional/global/stigmergic networks. Communication networks are easily coordinated and create “virtual public spheres” (Langman 2005). Virtual public spheres are places in cyberspace where people and information intersect in virtual communities or subcultures (Langman 2005). Communities that are organized and cultivated on the Internet are just as real as the face-to-face interactions humans use on a daily basis. The Internet provides a space where people can acquire and share information as well as interact, debate and negotiate about issues pertaining to society (Langman 2005) – elevating the speech of all individuals, not just those in a position of power, like never before in human history.

The Internet is incredibly empowering – the feedback loop between the Internet and civil society is an engine driving cultural evolution. The rise of global communication, among all tiers of society, will have huge implications for the future of human civilization.

It is important then, for all libertarian theorists, anarchists, and liberty minded individuals to recognize and challenge threats to the Internet. As empowering as network mutualism can be, technology also tends to centralize power – especially as it is the privileged intelligentsia that mainly moves innovation in this field forward. This gives the elite few the power of dominance over the many. Technology is often born in a system of bureaucratic control that champions a social structure based in top-down hierarchies. This is why the democratic nature of the Internet and our virtual public spheres are so unique – they deserve our protection.

Wherever there is human flourishing, rest assured either a state or corporate bureaucrat (often both) discover a system they argue needs taxation, moderation, regulation and/or prohibition. Take Zach Epstein's warning that a new privacy-killing CISA clone is now a step closer to becoming law. He writes:

We all remember the outrage that swept the Internet and ultimately played a role in defeating CIPA, a proposed law that would have allowed government agencies and tech companies to exchange private information about United States citizens without their knowledge and without a warrant. Well, it's time to get ready for another round of outrage because CIPA's controversial successor is now a step closer to becoming law.

He is referring to the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of 2014 – approved by the Senate Intelligence Committee in mid-July. The new law (CISA) would allow companies to share private user data with local and federal law enforcement if the claim is made that it relates to any kind of alleged criminal activity. Another piece of legislation allowing the state-corporate apparatus to set-up wiretaps without warrant.

Now take the much more discussed Net-Neutrality debate. The Federal Communications Commission received more than 1 million public comments on the issue of net neutrality during a five-month commenting period for a proposal that would allow cable companies to charge content providers extra fees to deliver faster service. NPR reports it is the biggest public response the FCC has ever gotten on a policy matter in such a short period, and the second most commented-upon FCC issue, period. The overwhelming response from the public was that the internet should remain open in nature to ensure its benefits can be shared by all.

In the same article, however, NPR asks George Washington University law professor Richard Pierce if the record breaking comments will even matter in the long run. Pierce notes that this has been extensively studied by academics and their research shows that rule-making or policy-making tends to be systemically biased to favor the industries that are affected by the regulation. NPR reports:

In a recent example, Pierce points to the work of Kimberly Krawiec. Krawiec read all of the comments that were submitted in the rule-making that led to the Volcker rule – part of the Dodd-Frank Act's banking reforms. She also reviewed the logs that described the meetings that agency decision makers had with parties who were interested in the outcome of that proceeding. Krawiec found that, while proponents of strict regulation of financial institutions dominated the comment process numerically, their comments were useless to decision makers, because the vast majority of them were identical form letters without data or analysis.

The folks who do comment with the detail, data and analysis that can change minds?
Deep-pocketed industries.

The academic conclusion: Research (and history) shows public comments do not affect outcomes – money talks. But, our speech is empowered like never before over the net. The best thing we can do for the Internet is to keep up the trend of decentralization. So far, the national debate has presented us with only two options:

1. We need the state to protect us from losing the internet to corporate control via regulation and legislative decree, or
2. We need the state to protect moneyed interests so corporations can practice their rights in the (state) capitalist market.

We must remember there is a third option – maintain common, mutual control over the net.

By the very nature of information ecology, we can keep the Internet innovative and free. All battles against the state and capital are uphill but we are all empowered by the Internet. As the Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) notes, as long as we continue to build and provide access to new market opportunities and create safe havens for free speech, the Internet will continue to empower and equalize horizontal social organization as opposed to vertical, top down hierarchies around the globe.

We are winning, simply because we talk and are inclined to labor with one another.

Information technologies are allowing for revolutions in markets, thus effecting business, government and global culture. For the first time in human history there is truly global communication. Though it is still a large privilege to have access to the Internet, more and more people, of many different socio-economic statuses, are crossing the digital divide and beginning to talk. As Tim Malone writes in *The Future of Work* about the coming revolution:

The new revolution promises to lead to a further transformation in our thinking about control. Where does power come from? Who should wield it? Who is responsible? Once again the result will be in a world where people have more freedom. A world in which power and control are spread more widely than our industrial aged ancestors would have ever thought possible...

Dispersed physically but connected by technology, workers are now able, on a scale never before imaginable, to make their own decisions using information gathered from many other people and places.

As Malone points out, emerging orders in society will continue the trend of decentralization. If left in common control the net will continually become democratic, highly organized, structured and efficient – it will be anarchic progress.

There has been a constant push throughout human history to decentralize when the time is optimal. The emergence of democracy, for example, shows off this trait. Now, in an era of low communication costs and emerging technologies, we may see enhanced social evolution, a stronger push to decentralize and the emergence of small social networks that can cause big changes in how we live our everyday lives. Information technology is beginning to impact our neighborhoods, cities, work places and governance. We are connected and, with each blog, tweet, event, post or review, prove we are not neutral, but instead are revolutionaries for network mutualism.

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