

305. "Are Virtual and Democratic Communities Feasible?" Democracy and New Media, Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn, editors. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003) pp. 85-100.

ARE VIRTUAL AND DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITIES FEASIBLE?⁽¹⁾

This paper asks whether communities and democracy can thrive in the new world, in cyberspace? This requires a two step examination. First, can there be virtual communities? Second, can these--and other (including offline) communities--govern themselves in a democratic way by drawing on new developments in cyberspace?

I. COMMUNITIES ON AND OFF

1. Communities Defined

The very term community has often been criticized as a concept that is vague and elusive, as a term that either has not been defined or cannot be defined, and as one that is used because of its political appeal rather than its scholarly merit.⁽²⁾ In response one should note, first of all, that terms commonly used in social science often resist precise definition, as in the case of such widely used concepts as rationality and class. And while "community" has often been used without an explicit definition, I have previously suggested the following definition: communities are social entities that have two elements. One, a web of affect-laden relationships among a group of individuals, relationships that often crisscross and reinforce one another (rather than merely one-on-one or chainlike individual relationships). The other, a measure of commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity--in short, to a particular culture.⁽³⁾

Among those who responded to this definition of community, Benjamin Zablocki noted that while the definition is quite clear, few communities left in modern societies meet its requirements.⁽⁴⁾ This is a common concern that has been with us since Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Töönnies suggested that modern history is marked by a transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gessellschaft*. Others have viewed our society as a "mass" society composed of individuals without shared bonds or values. Actually, while there has been a decline in community, many social entities that fit the definition provided above abound even in large metropolitan areas. These communities are often ethnicity based. Communities are found in Little Havana, Chinatowns, Koreatown, Spanish Harlem, on the south shore of Boston, and in Williamsburg, NY, among many others. Others are composed of people who share a sexual orientation (for instance gay communities) or an occupation (for instance, the medical staff of some hospitals).

Important for the discussion that follows is that community, as defined, need not be local or residential. The faculty of some small colleges make one community even if they do not live next door to one another or on the campus. The same holds for the members of a labor union local.

The definition excludes interest groups. Groups of people who merely share an interest in lower tariffs, in gaining a tax deduction and so on, as a rule do not a community make. They share no affective bonds or a moral culture. (Of course, some social entities can both be a community and share some interests, but this does not

negate the difference between these two concepts.) In short, communities can be defined and are far from defunct.

2. Are there virtual communities?

Many of those who argue that there can be no true communities in cyberspace implicitly follow a different notion as to what a community is than the one relied upon here (which, in my judgment, is quite close to what most people mean when they employ the term.) These critics of virtual communities have in mind numerous accidental rather than essential features of offline communities, such as face to face meetings. One should grant that online communities do not have all the features of offline ones (nor do offline communities have all the features of online ones). But the question is, can cyberspace meet the basic prerequisites of communities?⁽⁵⁾

The answer is the affirmative, although one must grant that the needed prerequisites are not often provided, at least not in full. Indeed, there is a distinct inclination by commercial sites to pretend that community exists (because such claims bring "eyeballs" to one's site) where there is none. To provide but one example, GeoCities purports to provide "neighborhoods" and "neighborhood clubs" within their "community," but these neighborhoods simply amount to collections of home pages and chat rooms that are about the same topic (for instance, "Sunset Strip" is a "neighborhood" of home pages and chat rooms devoted to the discussion of rock and punk rock).

More generally, a very large part of the communications and transactions on the Internet either are not interactive at all (e.g., placing an order for a consumer product) or are only point to point (e.g., exchange of email messages), which by themselves do not make communities. In 1998, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Center for the People and the Press, the following percentages of online users engaged in the following activities at least once a week: 72% sent email, 47% did research for work, and 38% got news on current events, public issues and politics. Far fewer users participated in online group activities. Only 22% engaged in online forums or chat groups, and only 4% engaged in online political discussions.⁽⁶⁾ A recent Gallup poll provided similar results, reporting that 95% of people online use the Internet to obtain information, 85% to send or receive email, and 45% use it for shopping, while only 21% visit chat rooms.⁽⁷⁾

But all that these facts show is that, just like offline interactions, the greater part of online interactions is not community focused. They do not indicate that communities cannot be formed on the Internet.

There are numerous informal accounts of strong affective bonds, the first element of communities, that have been formed via the Internet as people who did not previously know one another meet on the Internet and form intense relationships. There are a fair number of reports of people who abandon their spouses on the basis of liaisons they formed online, and some of singles who met in cyberspace and married.

The second element, forming a shared moral culture, is much less often met. At first, it may seem that chat rooms could provide opportunities for developing such a culture (as well as affective bonds) because at first glance they bear some resemblance to communities: groups of people meet and interact. The main reason, in my judgment, that the hundreds of thousands of chat rooms that exist do not, as a rule, provide for shared cultures (nor affective bonds) is the way they are set up. Typically, chat room participants use aliases, and are keen to maintain their anonymity. Exchanges are

very brief and intersected by other exchanges that occur in the same "space." Participants tend to engage in very limited exchanges and often engage in a false presentation of self.⁽⁸⁾ As a result, piecing together a picture of the person one deals with, which may well be a prerequisite for forming shared values (as well as affective relationships) are hampered. The situation is akin to meeting someone for the first time on a bar stool or on an airplane flight. Conversation tends to be superficial and no relationship develops.⁽⁹⁾

The conditions under which virtual communities would thrive are, in effect, the mirror opposite of chat rooms: membership would be limited in number and relatively stable; members would have to disclose their true identity, and it would be verified. In addition, the subjects explored would cover a broad range rather than be limited to a few such as stock tips or dating-related banter. The fact that so far these conditions are infrequently satisfied should not be viewed as suggesting that they cannot be met; it merely suggests that they do not readily lend themselves to profit-making (and hence of little interest to those who run chat rooms on the Internet), and that they conflict with the individualistic ideologies of those who originally shaped the Internet.

While the said conditions for successful community building are rarely satisfied in full by such chat rooms, some are met via thousands of so-called clubs run by Yahoo!, Excite, and eCircles. Membership in these clubs is limited to a given number (say, 2,000). In some, one needs to apply to become a member. While many of these clubs are listed in indexes maintained on the respective web sites, one can refuse to list a club in order to protect it from open-ended participation.

At the same time, these clubs do not provide for disclosure of self or verified identity. In addition, the topics they specialize in are often quite narrow and limited (for example, examples of Excite clubs include "Amateur Astronomers" (1159 members), "Amateur Models of Virginia" (1046 members), and "The Homebrewing Club" (340 members).

eCircles has a more personal focus than other online club sites. It provides families and friends with private areas within cyberspace to meet and exchange messages, and is less interest or issue based. H-net runs some eighty "clubs" that fully meet the said conditions: not only is participation limited, but identities are disclosed. (Albeit the subjects under discussion are rather specialized such as French literature in one club and certain periods of German history in another.) So far there are no studies of the community building effects of these clubs, although personal observation suggests that they are considerably stronger than those of the typical chat rooms.

MediaMOO has been occasionally referred to as a true online community, although the extent to which it lives up to this description is at least unclear.⁽¹⁰⁾ Howard Rheingold's accounts of online communities are often cited as examples of the possibility of developing close relationships and a rich emotional life online. For instance, he describes an online funeral he attended as a "rite of passage for all of [the virtual community] CIX, a time when the original members of the group felt closest to each other."⁽¹¹⁾ According to Rheingold, there were strong affective bonds among group members and there was a shared group history and culture (i.e, the group Rheingold describes qualifies as a real community according to the definition of community I proposed above).

Finally, one should also not overlook that some online communities work to complement and reinforce existing offline communities. (I refer to these as hybrid

communities.) There is something artificial about the very way the question is typically posed, comparing virtual to other communities. After all, nobody lives in cyberspace; even the avatars in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* are put on by three dimensional people. The more realistic questions that arise concern community (and democracy) in a new world in which there are both on and offline group relationships. (Rheingold, who is a firm believer in the depth of online relationships and community, nevertheless describes how his online relationships often led to face to face meetings and friendships.)

Among the reports of neighborhood communities significantly reinforced by virtual links is the often-cited example of Blacksburg, Virginia. Around 87% of Blacksburg's residents are online⁽¹²⁾, and the town has an online community called Blacksburg Electronic Village (www.bev.net). Both the town and the various groups and neighborhoods in it benefit from their ability to post meetings, share information, and interact via the shared site.

All said and done there are very few reports of full-fledged, purely online communities. It is rather difficult to establish whether the reason for this finding is that the Internet has not been set up to facilitate community building despite the fact that this could be quite readily done, or (as several have argued) there is something in its structure that inherently prevents true community formation. I personally hold that communities would thrive if stable and disclosed membership would be made relatively easy to attain, but this remains to be demonstrated. There is, though, little doubt that online communities can significantly reinforce offline ones.

3. Quantitative data

The discussion so far has focused on so called qualitative observations, one case at a time. There is, though, considerable quantitative data concerning the ability to form and to sustain social relations on the Internet. Because these data concern not merely friendships (which can be merely between two people, and are hence point to point) but also families (which contain community-like web relationships), these data speak to the question of whether one of the key prerequisites of community building can be met online.

The question of whether cyberspace agitates against social bonds or enriches it has been recently examined by several studies. One study, by Norman H. Nie and Lutz Erbring, has claimed to find that the Internet is detrimental to such bonding.⁽¹³⁾ According to them, "the more hours people use the Internet, the less time they spend in contact with real human beings."

Nie and Erbring say, "Internet time is coming out of time viewing television but also out at the expense of time people spend on the phone gabbing with family and friends or having a conversation with people in the room with them." They acknowledge that most Internet users use email, which increases their "conversations" with family and friends via this medium, "but you can't share a coffee or a beer with somebody on e-mail or give them a hug." In short, "The Internet could be the ultimate isolating technology that further reduces our participation in communities even more than did automobiles and television before it."⁽¹⁴⁾

The findings of the study are summarized in the following table.

13% spend less time with family and friends

8% attend fewer social events

34% spend less time reading the newspaper

59% spend less time watching television

25% spend less time shopping in stores

25% are working more at home (without any decline in work at the office)

*Source: Stanford Institute for the Qualitative Study of Society (the table was published in *The New York Times*, 16 February 2000, sec. A, p. 15.)*

What do Nie's and Erbring's figures actually show? In discussing the findings one must note that they concern two groups of people: those who are not connected to the Internet (N=2078) and those who are connected (N=2035). The latter are further divided into light users (less than 5 hours per week; 64% of the "connected" sample) and heavy users (more than 5 hours per week; 36% of the "connected" sample).

Of all users only 9% said that they spend less time with their family, and 9% said they spend less with their friends, while nearly ten times more people--86% and 87% respectively--said that they spend the same amount of time with family and friends as before! Moreover, quite a few (6% and 4% respectively) reported that they spend more time with family and friends. The proper headline of their study should have been: "Internet does not significantly affect social life."

The picture does not change much even if one focuses on the heavy users. Only 10% of those who spend 5 to 10 hours online per week reported that they spend less time with family and friends, and only 15% of those who are online 10 or more hours per week said so.

The finding that some Internet users spend more time with family and friends may at first seem unlikely, but it is hardly so. The study itself shows that by far the largest effect of Internet activity for all users is to reduce the amount of time spent watching TV (46% of users) and shopping (19%). For heavy users, 59% spend less time watching TV and 25% spend less time shopping. (Obviously it takes less time to order things from eToys or Amazon than to go to a mall or store.) The study did not inquire into how the time saved in these ways is used and whether or not some of it is allocated to increasing social life.

Along the same lines, the study found--as is widely known--that people's most common use of the Internet is communicating via email. This, too, is a time-saving device compared to letter writing and even phone calls. Ergo the Internet readily allows people to spend both more time on the Internet and more time socializing. In effect, the fact that people use the Internet largely for communication (90% use email) and not shopping (36% buy products online) or banking (12%), and that most of this communication is with people they are familiar with rather than with strangers, strongly suggests that people relate to one another more rather than less because of the Internet.

A study on technology by the Kaiser Family Foundation, National Public Radio, and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government reported the following findings:

Despite their overall positive attitudes, Americans do see some problems with computers and technology... More than half say computers have led people to spend less time with their families and friends (58%). Furthermore, slightly fewer than half (46%) of Americans say that computers have given people less free time, although 24% who say computers have given people more free time and 28% who say computers haven't made much of a difference.⁽¹⁵⁾

Note, though, that people were asked about computer use, not their Internet connections. The question people were asked was, "Do you think the use of computers has given people more free time, less free time, or hasn't it made much difference?" This kind of question makes people think about non-interactive uses of their computers, especially word processing, preparing documents, number crunching, and so on. Questions about use of the Internet, which is merely one function of computers, are more revealing.

A study released in May 2000 by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found clear evidence that email and the Web have enhanced users' relationships with their family and friends -- results that challenge the notion that the Internet contributes to isolation. Significant majorities of online Americans say their use of email has increased the amount of contact they have with key family members and friends. Fifty-nine percent of those who exchange email with a family member say they are in contact with that relative more often thanks to email. Only 2% say they are in contact less often with this family member since they struck up their e-correspondence. Email users say virtually the same thing about the frequency of their contact with close friends via e-letters. Sixty percent of those who email friends say they communicate more often with a key friend now that they use email and 2% say they do so less often.

Additional Pew findings make an even stronger case:

As a group, Internet users are more likely than nonusers to have a robust social world. The use of email seems to encourage deeper social connectedness. The longer users have been online, the more likely it is that they feel that email has improved their ties to their families and friends. Forty percent of Internet veterans--those who have been online for at least three years--say there has been a lot of improvement in their connections with family and friends because of email, compared with just over a quarter of Internet newcomers (those online for six months or less) who report that.

Even more impressive are the Pew findings that

More than those who have no Internet access, Internet users say they have a significant network of helpful relatives and friends. Some 48% of Internet users say they can turn to many people for support in a time of need, while just 38% of nonusers report they have a large social network. Furthermore, only 8% of Internet users indicate they are socially isolated - that is, they say they have no one or hardly anyone they can turn to for support. In contrast, 18% of nonusers say they have no one or hardly anyone to turn to.⁽¹⁶⁾

Finally, a Harris poll found that,

Because people are online, they tend to communicate more often with their friends and family. Almost half (48%) of all adults who are online at home say they communicate more often with friends and family than they did before they could use email. Only 3% say they communicate less.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that many more people say that they meet and socialize with friends and family more often because of the Internet than do so less often (27% v. 9%). This debunks the theory that Internet users cut themselves off physically from social interaction.⁽¹⁷⁾

All said and done, meaningful and reinforcing interactions seem to be quite common in the online world. Under what conditions these suffice to satisfy the first prerequisite for community remains to be established. As I argued in the previous section, the conditions for forming shared cultures are possible to create online, but they are not often provided. Call me moderately optimistic on this account. As I see it, the evidence suggests that if the Internet were to be made more community friendly along the lines discussed in the first section, online communities might be much more common.

II. Communities' Cyberspace Democracy.

The same question can be applied to online, offline, and hybrid communities: can they be democratically governed by drawing on the Internet? For democracy to thrive at least four prerequisites must be satisfied. Numerous studies show that two key prerequisites, sharing information and voting are quite feasible on the Internet. The third element, that of deliberation, has been much less often explored, but, I shall attempt to show below, seems to pose no insurmountable difficulties once Internet designers put their mind to fashioning the software needed for deliberation in cyberspace. The same holds for the fourth element, that of representation.

i. Sharing Information

Much has been made in several writings on the subject, and even more in numerous projects dedicated to the subject, that information can be distributed, stored, retrieved, duplicated, and illustrated with much greater ease and at much lower costs on the Internet than in the offline world. This is undoubtedly true. One should not, however, accord too much importance to information sharing as an element of democratic governance. True, providing voters with all the speeches made by all the politicians, a full catalogue of all the positions they have taken in the past and every vote they have cast, is helpful. The same is true of having web sites chock full of information about the issues of the day.

However, at the end of the day, voters can cast only one vote per election. For instance, in a presidential election they cannot vote for the environmental policies of a given candidate but against his foreign policy, for his position on choice but against his ideas about health insurance, and so on. Hence, detailed information about these issues and the positions of the candidate are not particularly useful for their decisions as to for whom to vote.

Those who suggest that people's decisions take the form of an index, in which they would inform themselves about numerous issues and then vote for the candidate who

gets the highest score, do not take into account that, in actuality, decisions typically seem to be made in a lexographic form: two or three considerations (for instance, the state of the economy and whether or not the country is involved in a war) make up for most of the "index" for most voters.

More important, for numerous voters the process is much less information driven than is quite often assumed. Values, party affiliations, and loyalties and community pressures play a very important role in determining the one choice they can make.

In short, the fabulous information features of the Internet are pro-democratic, but they surely add much less to existing democratic institutions than the more dedicated information enthusiasts presume.⁽¹⁸⁾

ii. E-voting

Initially there was great concern that voting on the Internet would lead to large-scale ballot box stuffing, fraud, and other forms of electoral abuse. However, as new encryption techniques have developed and procedures for recognizing e-signatures have been approved, these concerns have subsided. It seems that in the future, with proper procedures in place, e-voting could be made at least as secure as offline voting which, after all, has never been perfectly authenticated.

The main difficulty in this area lies elsewhere, namely in access. Democracy, of course, requires that all those who have reached a given age, are citizens of a given polity, and have not been convicted of a crime will be allowed to vote. At the moment, significant parts of the population, especially the poorer and otherwise disadvantaged ones, do not have personal computers and hence cannot vote electronically. However, this defect is rapidly being corrected as the cost of computers and other devices that allow access to the Internet are plunging. Providing the rest of the population with a device needed to vote could be easily contemplated.

France long ago provided all citizens with devices resembling personal computers to provide them access to Minitel, France's pre-Internet public electronic system. While Minitel is not used for voting, the distribution of Minitel terminals to private citizens and their placement throughout France in public kiosks demonstrates the possibility of providing widespread access to an electronic network.

iii. Deliberation and Community

Deliberation, an important prerequisite for sound democratic processes, is much less often discussed than information sharing or voting, because of a tendency to view democracy in a simple way, as one in which people vote and the majority rules. Ross Perot, for instance, proposed that leaders and experts could present Americans with a set of options, and then the people themselves could vote for their preferred one, skipping the deliberative step.⁽¹⁹⁾

It is, however, widely recognized that if a proposition is put before the voters, and they are allowed to immediately click their responses (say in some kind of electronic form of the kind of initiatives many states offer their voters), the result will reflect the worst impulses of the people, their raw emotions, readily wiped up by demagogues.

Democratic polities provide two antidotes to this danger: delay loops and opportunities for interaction among the voters. First, they allow time for voters to examine the issues and discuss them with other community members--in town meetings, over their fences, in bars, and so on--before votes are taken. For e-

democracy not to turn demagogic it will have to provide such delay loops--in other words, time for deliberation--and opportunities for interaction among the voters in between the time a proposition or a slate of candidates is put before the voters and the time the votes are cast.

Delay per se provides no difficulties. There is no reason votes have to follow immediately, or even very closely, the presentation of a choice to an electorate.

The second element, interaction, provides more difficulties. As we have seen in the discussion of communities, chat rooms' composition and rules of access and anonymity do not provide sound conditions for meaningful interaction, let alone democratic deliberation. If democracy is to thrive on the Internet, provisions will have to be made to provide for, indeed foster, the kinds of interaction deliberation requires. Deliberation is most fruitful among people who know one another and in small numbered groups with low turnover--the same conditions that nurture communities.

The difficulties here are not inherent in the technology; there seem to be no obvious reasons these conditions could not be readily met on line, but so far they have not been--largely, it seems, because they may not be profitable and because of ideological objections to any setting aside of online anonymity.

iv. Representation and mandates

Democracy works best, as has been well and long established, when the voters do not directly decide which policies they favor (as they do in plebiscites and in initiatives), but instruct their elected representatives as to what their basic preferences are, and then allow them to work out the remaining differences. (The more limiting the mandate the voters provide their representatives, the stricter the instructions, the more difficulties representatives have in working out the inevitable compromises that democracy entails, as people of different values and interests must find a shared course.) This is, of course, the way parliaments work, as well as state assemblies and most city councils.

The Internet, which has not yet been groomed to serve democratic processes, has no established procedures for representation. However, there are on the face of it no special difficulties in providing for representation. Indeed, decades ago the author conducted an experiment on this matter, using a much more "primitive" technology than the Internet.

The experiment was conducted with the help of the League of Women Voters at a statewide level. The League's New Jersey chapter was attempting to decide, as it does once a year, which issues deserved priority. We organized the League's members into groups of ten, and they conducted "town meetings" by means of conference calls. Each group chose its own priorities and selected a representative to take these preferences to the next level for discussion. We then held conference calls with groups of ten representatives, who decided among themselves which views and preferences to carry to the third and final level, at which statewide policy decisions were made.

A survey established that the League's members, who participated in the decision and representation process, were highly satisfied with the results. The experiment allowed all the members of the League to participate in the decision-making process, and yet the elected representatives were free, within an area indicated by those who elected them, to work out a league-wide consensus.⁽²⁰⁾

There is little reason to doubt that such a multi-layered, representative model can be applied to online communities, but can it serve nationwide democracy, in which many millions of individuals are involved? Can there be a representative nationwide democratic process that relies at least in part upon online devices?

I suggest that the answer is in the affirmative, drawing on the magical power of exponential curves: if representatives were layered in the suggested manner, millions of participants could quite readily be included. Suppose that various experts addressed the country on Sunday from 10:00 to 11:00 am about whether the United States should cut back the military by 50 percent over five years. The conference buzz would start with groups of fourteen citizens, each having an hour to discuss and vote. Each group would elect one representative to participate in conference call discussions with thirteen representatives of other groups. Each group of representatives would in turn elect an individual to speak for them, and so on in a rising pyramid. If this process occurred seven times, by six o'clock in the evening 105 million adults could be reached, which is more than the 91 million who voted in the 1988 presidential election.

The same basic approach could be readily applied to the Internet. Voters could convene in, say, 25-person online town meetings. Their discussion would be much more productive than those of chat rooms because the number of participants would be limited, they would already have some shared attributes (all from the same area?), and they would realize that at the end of a given time period they would have to provide a mandate to their elected representative on the next level of this town hall pyramid. Then the representatives of the separate 25-member groups would be convened and so on.

Participants would soon learn that the views of those groups that provide their representatives with very detailed instructions, and leaving them with little room to negotiate, as a rule would more than likely be left out of the final consensus-making process than those that provide their representatives with relatively broad mandates. Moreover, members would realize that if many groups were to provide their representative with narrow and strict instructions, national politics would tend to be confrontational and unproductive.

A major issue is left unaddressed here. Multi-layered or representative democracy conducted by the use of the Internet could vary a great deal in terms of two variables. One is the scope of issues submitted to a full court multi-level deliberative process of the kind depicted above. For instance, is the public at large going to be invited to deliberate and instruct its representatives only on a few issues every umpteen years--or much more often? Second, are the representatives chosen in the "lower" levels going to change with each issue, or will they serve set terms? And will any of the modifications suggested in the preceding discussion going to make virtual democracy more democratic or more populist?

In short, the Internet could not only fully duplicate offline democratic procedures and outcome, but it could improve upon them. It would be much easier online than offline for millions not merely to gain information and to vote, but also to participate in deliberations and in instructing their chosen representatives.

III. In conclusion

The paper argues that some qualitative accounts and quantitative data suggest that communities can be formed on the Internet. They are much more likely to thrive in

"clubs" in which membership is relatively stable, participants disclose their identity, and the subjects under discussion are significant and encompassing rather than narrow and specialized. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that because people live both on and offline, online communities can reinforce offline ones.

Regarding the use of the Internet for democratic processes for on or offline communities--small or large ones--we agree with those who suggest that information sharing and voting can be quite readily accommodated. However, I stress the importance of providing for deliberations and representation, the software for which is, as a rule, not available.

All that has been argued so far is that virtual democracy is quite feasible. It remains to be discussed whether or not greater reliance on virtual politics would make the joint on and offline polity more or less democratic than it currently is.

ENDNOTES

1. I am indebted to my friend and colleague David Anderson for his comments and suggestions on this paper. I am also indebted to Andrew Volmert for research assistance and valuable comments on previous drafts of this paper.
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13. Norman H. Nie and Lutz Erbring, *Internet and Society: A Preliminary Report* (Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society, February 17, 2000); available at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/siqss/>.

14. Press Release, Stanford Institute for the Qualitative Study of Society, February 16, 2000; available at: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/siqss>
15. "Survey Shows Widespread Enthusiasm for High Technology," report from the Kaiser Family Foundation, National Public Radio, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, February 29, 2000; available at: <http://www.kff.org>.
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17. Humphrey Taylor, "The Harris Poll #17: The Impact of Being Online at Home," New York: Harris Interactive Inc., March 22, 2000.
18. See Bruce Bimber, "The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism," *Polity* 31, no. 1 (1998): 133-160. Citing Walter Lippmann, Bimber argues that any problems with a democracy are not the result of a lack of information, and that providing citizens with extensive information will not radically change their political behavior. See also David M. Anderson, "The False Assumption about the Internet," *Computers and Society*, March 2000, 8-9. Anderson argues that the Internet can and does do much more than merely provide information.
19. See "Ross Perot, One-Way Wizard" (editorial) *The New York Times*, April 24, 1992, sec. A, p. 34.
20. For more about this experiment, see Amitai Etzioni, "Teledemocracy," *The Atlantic* 270, no. 4 (1992): 36-39 and Etzioni, "Minerva: An Electronic Town Hall," *Policy Sciences* 3, no. 4 (1972):457-74.