Comprehensive Restructuring Needed to Kick-Start Moribund Telecom Industry

By Katherine Moore

Edward W. Said, acclaimed literary critic famous for his role in reshaping of English and comparative literature at Columbia University for more than four decades, died on Thursday, Sept. 25, after a 12-year battle with leukemia. He was 67.

Said was born both as a scholar of modern literature, theory and of international and Middle Eastern politics. He was a staunch advocate for the Palestinian cause and a member of the Palestinian National Council.

As a teacher and writer, authoring more than 20 books during his lifetime covering a range of topics from Joseph Conrad to musicology—and translated into more than 30 languages—Said's ground-breaking work "Orientalism," (Pantheon, 1978) is considered a seminal evaluation of Western misperceptions of the East. The book set the stage for post-colonial studies and is required reading for many college students.

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Edward Said was an accomplished literary critic and was an assistant professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University. He was a generous colleague and friend. It is hard to imagine Columbia without him.

"His personal friend Samalan Rushdie described the book as, "...an intensely moving act of reclamation and understanding." Those of us whose lives have been lived between cultures...will find a painful beauty in Said's work. Said has given such eloquent personal expression to the experience of multiple cultures that such study is essential to a good and meaningful life.”

Addressing consistent and universal themes of nationalism, moral choices, majority versus minority rights and political oppression in this writing over the years, Said brought a sense of justice and tolerance to his readers. This insight also transcended the years, said Alan Brinkley, Business School Professor, Eli Noam, and was an assistant professor of English and comparative literature.

Quite likely, the present downturn is only temporary, say the researchers. The real problem for the industry, however, is not a one-time recovery, they explain.

The main problem of the telecom industry is that this once stable and predictable sector has entered a chronic pattern of volatility, with boom and bust scenarios becoming a common occurrence rather than aberration, says CITI director and Business School Professor, Eli Noam.

The consequences of this volatility ripples far beyond the telecommunications industry itself, says Noam. Telecom communications was once an adjunct to industrial production, but today's telecommunications is a critical factor in the information economy and society. Furthermore, the importance to modern society of electronic communications makes the resilience of the network system a matter of national importance to the economy and security.

Given the magnitude of the problems, a major overhaul is needed to jumpstart this troubled industry. The CITI study lays the groundwork for such a comprehensive restructuring by pin-pointing the fundamental and long-range trends contributing to the nursing of the telecom bubble, and provides a series of key recommendations for pulling the industry out of its slump.

"The telecommunications sector is no longer subject to the linearity of the traditional utility business," says Noam. "but rather is plagued by structural instability because it is such a capital-intensive business, competitive recourses trending inevitably reducing margins to unsustainable levels. This is a flawed model for robust competition and leads to an oligopolistic structure.

"It is hard to imagine Columbia without him," Provost Alan Brinkley.

Columbia Mourns the Passing of World-Renowned Intellectual Edward W. Said

By Robert C. Atkinson

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e is no secret that the telecommunications industry, including telecom suppliers and internet service providers, is in the midst of an unprecedented shakeout. What is not as widely understood is why this is so and what is needed to jumpstart this vital industry.

Researchers from Columbia's Institute for Tele-Information (CITI), based at the Columbia Business School, have embarked on an ambitious project to get at the heart of this crisis, with researchers recommending that a comprehensive restructuring by pinning down the groundwork for such a comprehensive restructuring by pin-pointing the fundamental and long-range trends contributing to the nursing of the telecom bubble, and provides a series of key recommendations for pulling the industry out of its slump.

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Short of embarking on an industrial policy of subsidies common in many countries, the researchers recommend a U.S. policy that identifies and eliminates regulatory bottlenecks that stand in the way of broadband deployment and application development, including a temporary easing of copyright rules for music and video content and mainstreaming tele-work, distance education and tele-medicine.

Other crucial steps needed include deregulating retail pricing, where wholesale pricing is likely to protect consumers; and requiring service providers to make their own bilateral agreements, with commercial arbiters stepping in if the carriers are unable to reach an agreement on interconnection issues.

Recent experience suggests that intra-model competition is not emerging on the infra-structure level. It will be important therefore to accelerate inter-modal competition among fixed line and wireless operators and treat each platform equally in terms of access to content and universal service support.

The study "Remedies for Telecommunication Industry: Network Resiliency Strategies: Risk and Recovery:" was supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and a number of leading global telecommunications firms from around the world in the industry. The principal research areas were divided into seven modules. While Noam led "Why the Crisis?," the module on the causes for the downturn, the other topics were each led by the following CITI researchers: Policy: Robert C. Atkinson (co-director of the project); Financial Recov

Robert C. Atkinson (Co-director of the project); Financial Recovery: James H. Alleman; Managerial Strategies: Raul Katz; Network Resiliency Strategies: Jonathan Liebenow; Fundamenta

ional Research: A. Michael Noll; The findings and recommendations are forthcoming.

Columbia's Lionel Trilling Department of English and Comparative Literature hosted a celebration of Said that included a screening of "Blow Out" by Brian DePalma, followed by a discussion with DePalma, moderated by Said's former student, Elia Kazan.

Said's best-known work, "Orientalism," has been reprinted in recent years, and Columbia University Press is planning another edition. A conference on Said's life and work will be held in his honor on Oct. 18-19. Said was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society and the Royal Society of Literature.

Robust competition among all sectors of the industry is crucial, said said.

Columbia will hold a memorial service for the community over the next few weeks. Please check the University's home page www.columbia.edu for forthcoming details.

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