

Introduction

(Second Volume of "Netizens Netbook" (Draft))

This draft book is the second volume of what I hope will become a series of books about netizen development which started with the "Netizen Netbook". This second volume is intended in part to recognize the development of the netizen phenomenon that has taken place in the past 20 years.

In the early 1990s, Michael Hauben made a scientific discovery when he recognized that an important advance of our times is not only the Net (i.e. the Internet), but even more importantly the rarely recognized emergence of the Netizen. The netizen represents the empowered online global citizen striving to make the Net and the world it is part of a more desirable and grassroots controlled environment. The vision Michael had is the foundation of the first Netizens Netbook. He was able to articulate both the vision and the signs that the vision was becoming a reality in the actions and consciousness of netizens made possible by the Net.

The first Netizens Netbook grew out of both online suggestions to Michael that he put his inspiring articles into a book and my thoughts that there was a need for a book that could look ahead in a scientific way, as the 17th Century economic writings I was reading at the time did for their times.

Based on Michael and my desire to publish such a book, I spent several months gathering the different articles Michael and I had written and putting them into a volume posted online in January 1994, more than 20 years ago this year.

We announced that the book would be available online to download via the protocol known as ftp (file transfer protocol). We put an announcement in a local events-of-the-week newspaper. We were able to arrange to use a room at the local community college for the event.

Just a few people came. One of those attending was a teacher I had worked with at the Ford Dearborn Engine Plant. A postman we knew from the post office who was also a computer enthusiast attended, as did a former neighbor who was a Commodore computer user. One person came from the notice in the events newspaper.

Michael read a selection from "The Net and the Netizen," one of his chapters in the book.¹ I had planned to read something, but I do not think there was time so I didn't present my selection. Mainly we managed to show that the book was put online and was available to be downloaded via ftp. This was January 12, 1994. It was only by 1993 that the Internet had substantially spread, though work on it had been in process for over 20 years by then, starting in 1973.

The first Netizen Netbook was a pioneering publication. Its title was "Netizens and the Wonderful World of the Net," Michael made sure the book was announced online. Later the title became "Netizens: On the history of Usenet and the Internet."

It is now 20 years later. Much as Michael had envisioned the Internet has spread broadly and widely. Also what has spread is the excitement of netizens who recognize that they are empowered by the Net and they take on to explore what this empowerment makes possible.

What has been quite fascinating is to meet and talk with netizens from different places around the world and to learn of their efforts and fortitude.

Also it has been quite fascinating to have had the experience of learning about and then becoming connected with the netizens of South Korea (where the Korean word for Netizen 네티즌 is pronounced net-i-zen) and with netizens in China.

In both South Korea and China, the work has been welcomed and spread and has been developed further.

When looking for the concept of netizen on the Korean search engine Daum one colleague told me, "You are famous in Korea." Actually it was the concept of 'netizen' and Michael's work that was famous. But what a thrill it was to hear such a sweet compliment for the work.

It is in Korea that netizens played the crucial role in the election of the President of the country in 2002 and where netizens took seriously both the weaknesses and the strengths of the empowerment that the Net promised.

In China, there are hundreds of millions of netizens and their amazing activity, of which the creation of an anti-cnn web site to counter the media myths about China spread by the western media CNN and BBC etc. is only one example.

Many people in China have hope for the future. That hope, they say is based on netizens and what they do online to challenge the abuse of power.

There are other examples of important netizen achievements. For example, netizens in Egypt built a means to communicate across the divide of those with left or right political perspectives.² Based on such achievements the Egyptian people were able to bring down the Mubarak government in 2011. Indonesian netizens were able to spread their communication from online to off line so the Indonesian people could prevail against Suharto in 1998.

Over these years, Michael's work has been quoted or referred to in many scholarly articles. The concept of the netizen has spread and been developed in significant ways. See for example the work of Haiqing Yu about the new form of citizenship being explored by Chinese netizens,³ or the work of Mark Poster about the potential of the netizen to provide a significant challenge to the corporate dominated globalization.⁴

For now, the tentative title for the new book is:

In the Era of the Netizen: Models for Participatory Democracy

I am proposing that the models for the future in politics, journalism, economics, and culture will emerge from those situations where there has been participation and communication to contribute to the generative development.

The dynamic form of the Netizen Netbook has been said to be "pathbreaking", "seminal", "a milestone" or the "renowned" book. Among the descriptions for Michael's work are, "the Original Netizen," "scholar, and "the first participatory historian of the Internet". There have been other interesting observations that have grown out of the spread of both the consciousness and the actions of netizens. For example, Mark Poster, a noted media scholar, recognized that "the netizen might be the formative figure of a new kind of political relations, one that shares allegiance to the nation with allegiance to the Net and to the planetary political space it inaugurated." In other words, creating a netizen global space along with contributing to a more netizen impacted nation state.

This new phenomenon, Poster maintains, "will likely change the relation of forces around the globe." Poster continues, "In such an eventuality, the figure of the Netizen might serve as a critical concept in the politics of democratization."

A different conception of the future that netizens may bring about has been proposed by Indian journalist Vinay Kamat who writes for the *Times of India*. He writes, quoting something written about South Korea:

"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 speak out independently of institutions or officials."

But then, referring 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, Kamat adds the implication that he sees. "Will it evolve into a 5th Estate?" he asks, contrasting the netizen and netizen journalism to the current mainstream media which is considered the 4th Estate. Kamat questions

whether netizen online discussion will become a power replacing the mainstream media. “Will social and political discussion in social media grow into deliberation?” he asks. “Will opinions expressed be merely, ‘rabble rousing’ or will they be ‘reflective’ instead of impulsive?”⁵

Articles such as these raise serious questions and hopes for the future, and they are just a few examples of the manifold articles being published around the world raising such questions about the possibility for the future of the netizen and netizen journalism and netizen democracy. These inspire me to hope that the new book will give some focus and encouragement to those raising such questions and exploring visions for the future.

Notes:

1. The chapter can be seen at <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x01>. The whole book can be seen at <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/>
 2. See for example, "Netizens in Egypt and the Republic of Tahrir Square"
<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/ronda2014/egypt.txt>
 3. Haiqing Yu, "From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of Post-Mao China about netizens and new form of citizenship". A version is online at http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au/media/File/media_citizenship.pdf
 4. Mark Poster, *Information Please*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006, page 70.
 5. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/ampnbspWe-are-looking-at-the-fifth-estate/articleshow/11133662.cms>
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Ronda Hauben, February 20, 2014