Communicative Power in a Globalized "Network Society"

Quick Look

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IIJO Quick Look Series

Scope and Intent

The SMA IIJO effort assesses the ways in which the Air Force (and by extension the Joint Force) can most effectively consider and integrate information into its activities to influence attitudes and behaviors across the competition-conflict continuum. Whether intentional or unintentional, every action or inaction, communicates a message (i.e., we cannot *not* communicate). Therefore, it is important to include communication as a first-order concern in planning and operations rather than an as afterthought. As the Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE) recognizes, "The future Joint Force will need to transition to a model that helps it visualize how audiences interpret information to facilitate effective and meaningful communication" (JCOIE, 2018).

The challenge of effectively using and communicating information is one that faces all individuals, groups and organizations. There is a broad body of research across multiple disciplines that addresses the issues faced by the Air Force and Joint Force. This Quick Look series mines that literature and identifies the theories, findings and applications that can provide a foundation for Joint Force efforts to effectively integrate information and influence into its activities across the competition-conflict continuum.

Series Structure

This series of Quick Looks builds out from a central hub; a model that lays out the elements and interactions that comprise an effective transactional communication process, and describes how internal and external influences can distort that process, causing miscommunication and misperception. Building from this, we have identified specific topics that bear most directly on the challenge facing the Joint Forces, and provided a deeper dive into these in a dedicated Quick Look. Figure A provides a visual of that coverage, and also illustrates how, through their connection to the central hub, each, while a stand-alone piece, both informs and is informed by the others.
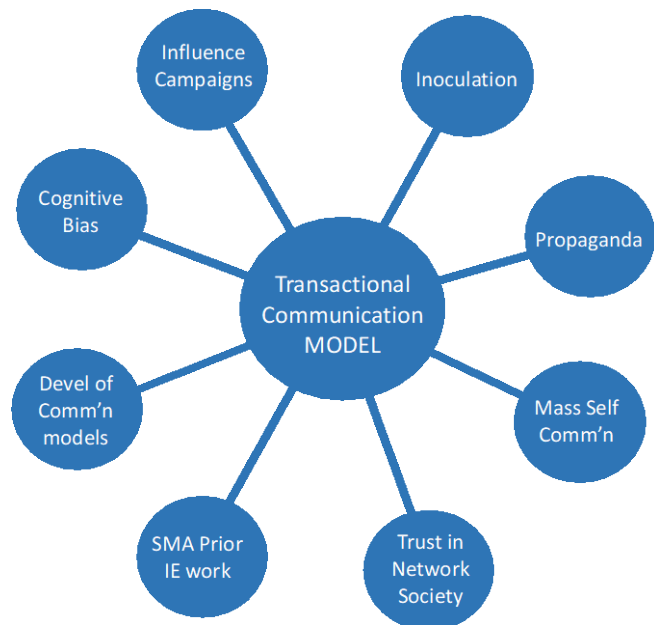

Figure A: Structure of IIJO Quick Look Series

Communicative Power in a Globalized "Network Society"

Human thought is probably the most rapidly propagating and influential element of any social system, on the condition of relying on a global/local, interactive communication system in real-time – which is exactly what has emerged now, for the first time in history…Thus, ideas, and specific sets of ideas, could assert themselves as the truly supreme value (such as preserving our planet, our species, or else serving God's design), as a prerequisite for everything else.

 Manuel Castells

KEY POINTS

- The economic and technological connectivities of globalization have created a "Network Society."
- The Network Society is comprised of interconnected social, organizational, and strategic networks capable of sending information globally at the speed of human thought.
- Connections between networks create information channels that give the Network Society its form.
- Control of message meaning between connected networks is not possible.
- Connections in the Network Society rely on trust.
- Trust is a function of communication.
- Networks have specific target points relevant to communication functions.

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

- The Network Society is an approachable conceptualization of integrated global society that argues patterns of established communication create access points between actors, whose connection then fundamentally alters the structure of the overall system, as if weaving fabric.
- Evaluating how to clearly communicate intention, value, and worth to another network is more important than attempts to control message meaning.
- Locating communication access points between networks is critical.
- To the extent that information can move at the speed of thought across the Network Society, an idea now has the power to alter the functional structure of a vast enterprise of integrated and coordinated human activity.

Introduction

This Quick Look report details key aspects of Manuel Castells' Network Society for the SMA IIJO effort, highlighting communication as a critical form of power in globalized modernity. Castells' work describes networks as critical elements of an emerging socio-economic dynamic that essentially revolves around the processing and distribution of information through technologies. Though networks have long existed in the organization of human affairs, the technological interconnectivity of the 21st century is such that the organizational logic of modern societies revolves around networking– that is to say, networks shape modern society (Pirogan & Katzenbach, 2017).

The goal of this Quick Look is to outline and describe the most important features of the Network Society and discuss the implications of those features for approaches to the information environment (IE) by the Joint Force. No matter

how capable the operator or well-designed the instrument, one cannot hit a ghost or strategically plan around abstraction. Castells' Network Society offers a tangible conceptualization of the IE. Rather than discussing an ambiguously amorphous "gray zone"-esque space of communication-based competition, the Network Society overlays a sense of structure (albeit fluid) to the IE that makes it approachable, definable, and targetable.

Communication processes and practices take on different forms and functions within networks that have implications for system control. In the Network Society, each individual is an assemblage of unique connections to information streams across different organizational, personal, and strategic networks. As a consequence, flows of information no longer follow typical sender-receiver models of communication. Instead, the communicative process is better understood as operating at an individual cognitive level, with each individual creatively reinterpreting and reshaping received messages around larger patterns of meaning from their surrounding networks. Control of message and the use of messaging toward the creation of common meaning are not viable strategic foci in networks. Alternatively, assessing communicative access points and creating common standards of information sharing between networks becomes critical to directing desired evolutionary outcomes within the system. For example, this approach to communication in the IE might enable friendly forces to elect courses of action (COAs) that are beneficial (or at least neutral) to US interests. Most important, the connective links of networks influence broader social relationships and, ultimately, the overall structure of the Network Society. Trust is required to form these links

between networks, as will be elaborated in the section "power in the network society."

> The central takeaway from this Quick Look is that trust is the most important source of power within our global system of interconnectivity and integration. Clear communication of intention, value, and worth are foundational to establishing trust.

Processes of Globalization

Globalization is an exaggerated and often overused catch-all descriptor for any process involving challenges to national cultures, economies, borders, and territories. Viewing globalization as an accomplished fact, and its associated succeeding impacts on culture and politics as irreversibly manifest, relies on the notion of a truly globalized economic system that some argue simply does not exist (Hirst, Thompson, & Bromley, 2009). Hirst et al. argue it is more useful to approach globalization as a series of four successive and overlapping processes that contribute to unfolding global interconnectivity and integration: (1) the increased movement of resources across geographic spaces, (2) an increased sensitivity to the alignment of key economic variables across distinct economic spaces, (3) the emergence of communication and information technologies that obliterate spatial boundaries, and (4) the growth of common standards that enhance/enable cooperation.

There is no centralized governing mechanism behind the processes of globalization; however, the unifying motivation for participation is principally economic in nature. The "rules" continually evolve as differing actors with differing inputs and access points to the four processes of globalization interact. Therefore, the possible emergent forms of control over

various aspects of globalized society can range from systems of outright imperialism or hegemonic organization of consent to multilateralism or so-called "durable disorder[1]" (Hirst et al., 2009). Critically, none of these are necessarily negative scenarios in relation to stability; as contented equilllibriums are not dependent solely upon system structuration.

How control manifests amid the increased interconnectivity and integration happening within the global system is very much dependent upon the interactions of political actors, corporate entities, institutions, and regular citizens still quite tethered to the nation-state system. However, these actors, entities, and institutions are engaged in discussions across borders through a host of communicative networks that allow for organizing of public opinion around common issues and interests to influence transnational political action (Fraser, 2007). The actions of these interconnected entities and actors revolve around access to the globalized marketplace, making consumption the principle mechanism of cultural exchange (Kluver, 2014). Established power within the globalized world unfolding before us relies on the creation of common standards transnationally across networks linked to consumption. These common standards serve as fixed endpoints of access affording cooperative action to ensue. However, the creation of common standards is inherently communicative and relies on trust.

The forces of globalized consumption have interconnected a host of societal actors and functions via communicative networks. Common standards between networks create access points that allow expanded connection to otherwise inaccessible actors and functions. The impact is therefore related to network access.

Common standards can be thought of as speaking a common language, the ability for two otherwise disconnected networks to transfer information between one another. Common standards can take many forms (e.g., computer code, media platforms, alphabet, organization, culture, etc...). Military operations in the information environment might focus on examining what those standards are and where the trust of neutral and/or hostile actors lies. Methodological training in techniques such as digital ethnography can aid operators in identifying and interpreting common standards in networks[2].

The Access Points of the Network Society

Castells argues the processes of globalization take place between interacting networks of competing, consumption-focused entities within the messy, technologically-driven "gray zone" spaces of the international system. The most consequential outcome to emerge from this globalized interaction of competing networks is what Castells calls the Network Society. The Network Society is the macro-network structure

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[1]Here durable disorder refers to competing cross-border networks of power, transforming identitites, and shifting loyalites creating equilibriums of perpetual low-level conflict. For further reading, see Cerny, P. G. (1998), Neomedievalism, civil war and the new security dilemma: Globalisation as durable disorder, *Civil Wars*, *1*(1), 36-64.

[2] See Murthy D. Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research. *Sociology*. 2008;42(5):837-855. doi:10.1177/0038038508094565

of interlinked networks whose communicative actions revolve around globalized consumption.

The processes of globalization have essentially created and expanded upon a variety of communicative networks. The actions of these networks have impacts across a vast and complexly interconnected system but relate primarily to how and where material goods are shipped and priced. The Network Society's webbed-like, interconnected structure of sub-networks can be harnessed to produce complex

> Networks are connected to one another by specific nodes. These nodes create access points that allow flows of communication to be arranged and channeled to targets across the macro-network system (Network Society). Power within the Network Society is directly related to the ability to direct channeled flows of communication across access points.

patterns of access. The connected nodes between and within sub-networks form a channel system whereby directed "flows" of communication can be opened and closed as nodes are learned and accessed. Within the military context, these networks, if properly controlled, can allow access, and as a consequence, information dissemination can become patternable and predictable (e.g. modeling social media disinformation campaigns to assess network (re)configuration around nodal sequences of data entry into the network).

Power in the Network Society

Why specific nodes and their associated communicative functions produce power in Castells' conception of the globalized network

society requires further elaboration on the definition and origins of power:

> *Power is the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interests, and values. Power is exercised by means of coercion (or the possibility of it) and/or by the construction of meaning on the basis of the discourses through which social actors guide their actions (Castells, 2009, p. 10).*

Castells argues there are three fundamental sources of power by this definition: *violence, capital*, and *trust*. Violence and capital can only be used in limited binaries: Violence is always negative-manifesting as either applied or as an ever-present, unapplied threat; capital is transactional-manifesting as given or taken away within a direct exchange. Additionally, violence works best in isolated, hierarchal systems (see a representation of a hierarchical system in Figure 1) when those who exert violence do not risk exposure to retaliation. Networks have lattice works of access points that expose vulnerabilities; this means the use of violence brings an increased risk of retaliation. Capital works best when systems are separated by distance and time (see a representation of a distanced system in Figure 1).[3]

Those with capital create greater access to price setting and resources in the transactional purchase of efficiency. One of the key processes of globalization, the obliteration of spatial boundaries, is a core fabric of the Network Society's creation. The advantages of efficiency related to access afforded by spatial distance and time have weaknesses in the Network Society, as

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[3] Image sources: Hierachichal systems; distanced systems; network systems.

Figure 1: Representations of a hierarchical system, a distanced system, and a network system

new and more efficient pathways of contact can instantly open through novel connections of networks.

In contrast to violence and capital, trust as a source of power in the Network Society has an amplifying, reshaping ability derived from creating common standards that allow communicative access. Trust can multiply its impact in that its application opens up and allows for interactions across otherwise inaccessible points within a networked system. Trust unlocks pathways and creates greater interlinkage to already interconnected networks, amplifying the ripples it creates across the larger system of the Network Society.

Imagine a person threatened with physical violence by an outside entity digitally hacking sensitive material from that entity, or an organization's paid advertisement campaign going viral after being manipulated negatively by activists. In the hacking example, linked network connections offer sensitive strike points that would otherwise be unavailable. In the viral advertisement example, networks allow those with access the ability to alter, reinterpret, and

redistribute the advertisement content through their unique connections across the Network Society. In both examples, common standards created by trust are vital to access and information dissemination. To hack sensitive information from an outside entity, an operator gains network access through common standards

> The malleability of a network's overall structure when new connection points are formed is why trust is favored as a source of power. The structure of the Network Society is shaped and patterned by the channels of access created by the trust. Trust establishes common standards of access between actors that function as threads across the larger fabric of the Network Society.

in the form of code trusted by the targeted system to execute commands. The viral spreading of content across connected social media platforms is also a function of trust (Cheng, Fu, & de Vreede, 2017). The more individuals are trusted within a network, the more likely they are to make significant contributions to the virality of content spread and the speed of that spread (Huh, Kim, Rath, Lu, & Srivastava, 2020). Here the common standards include the media platforms

used as well as contextually known commonalities between users that allow meaning to be shared (e.g. shared language, culture, identity, etc…).

The Risk of Common Standards

Essentially, the global Network Society is a decentralized matrix of interconnected network systems possessing the ability to transfer information and create access at the speed of thought. While globalization continues to unfold, the interconnection and creation of networks across different domains continues the rapid advancement of the larger, multi-dimensional structure of the Network Society. It is important here to recall that the processes of globalization are incomplete and that networks are not fully integrated into all aspects of the Network Society. This means that new and novel creations of access points to other networks, taking place through the continued processes of globalization, fundamentally alter the structure and flows of information and resources within the larger Network Society; new or dismantled connections essentially warp the structure of the network as if a thread pulled through the fabric.

The evolving nature of network connectivity also means that access entails the same multi-dimensional complexity as contained within the Network Society. What access *IS* necessarily depends on domain-specific common standards underpinning the connectivity of networks. Access can be as abstract as the ability to share information within an online social community or as tangible as being able to coordinate the unlocking of doors remotely; how access manifests is dependent on the nature of the established common standards. In this way, outcomes from the patterns produced by access also have a dimensional structuration based on

networked domains. Mapping the structure of network connections across dimensions therefore entails complex targeting considerations.

As Gutiérrez et. al (2012) point out, connected networks are complex mathematical objects with the ability to encode targetable information about the fluid and irregular structure of interactions between coupled nodes (Gutiérrez, Sendiña-Nadal, Zanin, Papo, & Boccaletti, 2012). Their work demonstrates a generic ability to "steer" networks toward desired evolutions given knowledge concerning the stability of the conjoined networks and through a selected targeting of specific nodes connecting networks (viz. if the network dimensional domains are known, specific nodes can be targeted in ways that guide networks into desired structure). Whereas attempts at control within network systems involve trying to stabilize connections among a potentially infinite number of unstable orbiting nodes, targeting seeks to steer the evolving dynamics of a network toward a new trajectory by intelligently selecting and impacting nodes at specific points (Gutiérrez et al., 2012). When applied to the military context, targeting allows economy of force to be employed on a network level, giving other involved actors the necessary stimuli to take actions beneficial to coalition forces, while not making it obvious that the US or coalition forces are involved in the targeting.

The varying dimensionality of connections between nodes inherent to networks means access within the Network Society ultimately relies on the creation of common standards to share information between otherwise non-communicative points; thus, access allows a

crossing of connected networks as well as a crossing of dimensional pathways.

To the extent that nodes require social interaction to establish common standards, trust is required. This is because the parties creating common standards are willfully granting access that could potentially be detrimental to their own ability to compete within the larger Network Society. Novel creation points necessarily entail novel restructuration to the multi-dimensional fabric of the Network Society; irrespective of system knowledge, some aspects of such restructuration will always remain unpredictable. Creating common standards therefore always carries the risk of displacement; for this reason, networks favor trust.

Thus, the communication of trust becomes an essential weapon within networks. Furthermore, knowing which nodes within networks are responsible for certain communicative functions becomes valuable strategic insight.

The Relevance of Putting Information First

Having explored a general outline of the Network Society, consider the various organizational, social, and strategic networks to which you currently have access. Consider which are digital, physical, and hybrid, as well as which intersect one another with connections besides yourself. Note that the multi-dimensional structure of the networks you participate in is uniquely yours, and that as a node connecting multiple networks, the degree to which you are able to share information across networks relates directly to your ability to meaningfully repackage that

information for new audiences by use of common standards. As a node, you create information flows via the connected access points you have established to other networks. The value of your position as a node relates to how many unique access points you have within and between networks, as well as your ability to meaningfully share information.

There are over seven billion people on Earth, and 4.57 billion of them are considered active internet users.[4] The penetration of global interconnectivity is currently at roughly 60% and expands evermore daily. As this expansion unfolds, traditional sources of power become increasingly effaceable. By contrast, the importance of trust in harnessing the power of communication expands alongside interconnectivity. Thus, the considered communicated impacts of information upon networks is the emergent battlefield of global power contestation–a battle of Communicative Power.

Power within the global Network Society comes from the ability to (1) define the communication standards within a network, (2) create or link together networks towards cooperative goals, and (3) fend off or destabilize competing networks. These specific levers of power rely on trust and make the IE a tangible space for strategic decision-making and coordinated information campaigns.

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[4] See https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/

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Figure 1: