1. Network Individualism

Network individualism as a theory embraces the responsibility of the individual to maintain his or her own personal networks. This sub group of active network is co-dependent on the circumstance that one acquires resources based upon one’s: skill, motivations, and interlinking connections. (Chua, 2013)

1.1 Pros of Networked Individualism

There are two main virtues of it.

First, it helps individuals to gain more resources, instrumental and emotional, because of the specialized relationship which changes the way people contact with each other in 5W---where, when, to whom, for what, by how. That is, wherever you are, whenever it is, people can try their best to get the opportunity to contact whomever for whatever purpose.

Second, libertarianism. It is especially for minority groups in different genders, religions, races, sex orientations and so on. These groups use the Internet Network to firstly reshape, complete and accept their identity. Next, construct virtual communities. At the end, they gain the virtual empowerment to change their life and this world.

1.2 Cons of Networked Individualism

Recognizable cons relevant for society as a whole are: limited accessibility, a concern of legitimacy, and low entry barriers.

Wellman (2002) defined limited accessibility and a populace characterized, in a distinct manner, as a “densely knit and loosely bounded network”. This statement negates the outliers or niches in people groups: the elderly, individuals in developing countries, and self-chosen non-participants. These people groups either are not able to interact through digital media, or have withdrawn from the platforms in totality.

Within the construct of network individualism, a legitimate apprehension about the legitimacy of users, as well as information provided by users, is an issue. Identity is now in question due to multiple identities, and profiles, either on the same or cross-platform. Many distrust these user interfaces due to their surveillance measures. The unethical use of user data can render users into a retrieval effect, meaning less activity.

Networks are free and have low entry barriers. Therefore the individual searches for their interests, and connects with those of similar interest; however, overtime people evolve and are exposed to other activities or topics of interest, leading to inactivity within the interface. Society collectively has given little, but taken what they deemed as valuable.

1.3 Discussion on Networked Individualism:

After highlighting the main components of Networked Individualism, the discussion led towards whether Networked Individualism can trigger a power shift politically. Thus, certain political aspects of the phenomenon were illustrated: facilitation of political engagement and invigoration of civic society, mobilization of individuals to gather and coordinate for political protest, as well as the raise of awareness in distant parts of the world. The main debate on whether these kinds of
networks were just a tool or the main factor for the uprisings in Middle East, was met with interest, with most people leaning to the former.

At the end, an example related to gay men was cited pointing out that network doesn’t create a new world. Although it makes up some social problems and helps people at a certain way, it’s only an extension of social activities. As for problems caused by networks, such as Internet addiction, the sense of loneliness or alienation, they can also be explained with former relative researches, such as those dealing with TV addiction. (Jihzou’s part, revised)

References:

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2. Surveillance

Approaching the concept of surveillance from a governmental perspective allows one to reflect upon the real purpose of governmental surveillance and how in the “digital era citizens” have seen their security, privacy and integrity threatened.

There are three main National Security Agencies coming from three different countries: USA, UK and Sweden:

1. National Security Agency – NSA (USA)
2. Government Communication Headquarter – GCHQ (UK)
3. The National Defense Radio Establishment – FRA (Sweden)

“Similiarly Sweden, an important northern European regional hub for internet traffic, passed the New Signal Surveillance Act in 2008, which permits Sweden’s National Defense to access all internet and telephone conversations in and out of (and through) Sweden. This involves a large number of communications, which originate from Norway, Finland, Denmark and Russia (Irion, 2009)…” (Miller, 2011:1064)

Every individual is now leaving a traceable footprint either in form of a credit card payment, a phone call an email, a text message or even entering a public space where there are security cameras. Citizens can easily be traced by governments who have access to all this private and personal information. Encryption was created to secure the users information but, as affirmed by the whistleblower Edward Snowden, these agencies have the available resources and knowledge to successfully break and trespass these encryptions and thus access any form of digital information. Citizens first came to understand that these agencies were explicitly created to strive for national security avoiding any possible attack and keeping its’ national citizens secure. Now with the digital age this fact has been turned around creating the complete opposite feeling. Citizens now feel that their basic freedoms are being threatened. So an agency that was first created to strive for its’ citizens security is now attacking and affecting these with no personal consent whatsoever.

All these events have triggered:

- A “Panopticom effect” (limitation/restriction of their action due to their fear of being traced or watched).
- A feeling of loss of ones’ basic freedoms
- Trust issues with the government and/or supranational powers like USA

Overall for states information is knowledge and as Francis Bacon said “knowledge is power”.

2.1 Sousveillance

Sousveillance was first defined by Mann, Nolan and Wellman in 2003 as an individual that is being surveilled by an organization, using technology to observe and surveil the same organization. It is a form of reflectionism which Mann (1998) defines as a: “philosophical framework for questioning social values (...) allows society to confront itself or to see its own absurdity.” (Mann, 1998:95). Hence, as a result of the technological revolution of “wearable computing” individuals can now record and document its everyday life and by doing so feel more
Sousveillance seeks to increase equality between the surveiller and the person being surveilled instead of trying to influence or regulate surveillance. It is a form of non-compliance and interference to problematize the surveillance. (Mann et al. 2003)

Sousveillance differs from surveillance in the way that it is rarely planned and usually only catches governments or organizations misbehave, one such example is from 1991 where several police men beat up Rodney King who they had pulled over for driving over the speed limit. The beating was caught on tape by an accidental bystander and spread through media resulting in the policemen, both those who took part in the beating but also those who stood by doing nothing, to be convicted for the event. (Mann et al. 2003)

Another distinction to be made is that sousveillance often is illegal, highly restricted in most countries by rules and regulations. While governments support surveillance, they tend to question sousveillance. (Mann et al. 2003; Mann & Ferenbok, 2013) Hence, it can and should be discussed to what extent sousveillance actually can do to even out the unequal power balance between the government and the citizens. It requires that individuals are willing to take the risk and the consequences for sousveillance. In addition, sousveillance could complete surveillance. For example, in 2005 a Brazilian electrician in London was shot to death by police, who mistook him for one of the suspects of the London bombings that same year. The CCTV tapes that would have caught the shooting were seized by the police but were reportedly blank, meaning that there was no documented evidence of the incident. Had instead a bystander caught the incident on tape much more could have been the actual events. (Mann & Ferenbok, 2013)

2.2 Discussion on Surveillance/Sousveillance:
The discussion part of this session was oriented in how the future of surveillance/sousveillance will be. In this context, it was articulated that those two concepts will rather co-exist within the social system, than necessarily counteracting each other. Moreover, sousveillance is perceived as the balancing force in the mediated society, supported by the technological evolution, which generates the ability to mobilize power against a subject or an institution at a higher position. In addition, future prospects for international laws enforcing control over either the government and/or citizens were examined. After a brief deliberation it was concluded that the law must clearly specify the criteria to be used for determining the cases in which surveillance is eventually legitimate. In case of surveillance and possible interference that exceeds what is stipulated by law -concerning their goals or clandestine character- such actions must be harshly punished.

References:


**The Economist**, 2013, Secrets, lies and America’s spies,