The Practice of Social Harmony with ICTs

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An IFIP SELECT paper for IT-professionals based on the research paper:


A Paradox: No social harmony facilitated with ICTs
The paradox is not that there is no social harmony facilitated with ICTs, but that it is largely invisible. In Davison (2017) I provided a few notable examples of ICT-facilitated social harmony, with examples from Mexico, Malaysia, Liberia and Indonesia, among others. However, I suspect that very few people were aware of these examples, important as they are. What people are much more likely to be familiar with is the opposite: the social hatred facilitated with ICTs. It is the social hatred that claims the media headlines and that increasingly seems to dominate policy formation, at least in some sections of our global society. But does it have to be like this? I can’t stop individual humans exercising their freedom to hate others, and to express that social hatred for all to see in public mediated by ICTs, but why do we want to pay attention? Who makes the editorial decisions that keep this social hatred forefront in our social consciousness?

Practical advice
The practical advice that I want to offer is no more than this: if we want to change, we can. But I must emphasise that the change will be necessary on multiple levels. We will need changes to who we are, how we relate to others, how we use technology. Fundamental changes by any account. I believe that there is plenty of positive social harmony that is facilitated with ICTs, but it is invisible and unreported. This ICT-facilitated social harmony
helps to make people’s lives better in multifarious ways, notably in developing countries where the potential for impact is great. Perhaps social harmony does not sell copy, does not make money for people; perhaps some find it utterly predictable and boring. But none of these reasons mean that it does not exist. Do we really want to read all the negatives and hatred and social disharmony? If we don’t then why do we tolerate it? Why don’t we write to newspaper editors and ask that they simply don’t report it at all. Why don’t we insist that social media firms delete this content, on the basis that inciting social hatred is hardly conducive to social progress, irrespective of freedom of speech? If that freedom to hate is so important, lets also have the freedom to be socially harmonious and to share our harmony.

What kind of a world do you want to live in?
In my original paper, I was critical of the co-optation of social harmony to the dark side in some countries, where the word ‘harmonise’ may also be associated with censorship. However, if the bright side of censorship is the eradication of social hatred, so be it. It is an extreme view, and not one that I would reach lightly, but if we can’t self-manage the content harmoniously, perhaps we have forfeited the right to manage it at all, and we need to let the censors do it for us.

I suspect that this is an unrealistic proposition in the so-called liberal democracies, but there needs to be an alternative to the social disharmony that currently prevails; there also needs to be a lot more reporting of social harmony, assuming that we want it. Do we? Do you? What kind of a world do you want to live in, do you want your children and grandchildren to grow up in?

References