Chapter 27

Controlling Informational Society:
A Google Error Analysis!

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ABSTRACT

“Informational Society” is unceasingly discussed by all societies’ quadrants. Nevertheless, in spite of illustrating the most recent progress of western societies the complexity to characterize it is well-known. In this societal evolution the “leading role” goes to information, as a polymorphic phenomenon and a polysemantic concept. Given such claim and the need for a multidimensional approach, the overall amount of information available online has reached an unparalleled level, and consequently search engines become exceptionally important. Search engines main stream literature has been debating the following perspectives: technology, user level of expertise and confidence, organizational impact, and just recently power issues. However, the trade-off between informational fluxes versus control has been disregarded. So, our intention is to discuss such gap, and for that, the overall structure of the chapter is: information, search engines, control and its dimensions, and exploit Google as a case study.

INTRODUCTION

The term “Information Society” or “Informational Society” emerges continuously in contemporary discussion. The intricacy to define it is well-known, but simultaneously, its content is somewhat clarified, when investigating the key features that characterize the most recent evolitional stage of western societies: communication, interaction, automation, post-industrial, specialist, service, immaterial needs, postmodern, or learning society (Castells, 2000; Webster, 2006). However, Ives Courrier (2000) differentiates “Information society”, and “Knowledge society”. Nevertheless, the historical roots of this sociological debate lie on the
work of Fritz Machlup (1962) and Peter Drucker (1969) to describe the changing economical paradigm. This work has been incessantly updated in order to demonstrate the economical, sociological, or even philosophical reconfigurations.

Given the introductory analysis an important question arises: how can “Information Society” or “Informational Society” be defined or characterized? During the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, representatives of governments and civil society organizations from 175 countries declared that: “… common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize, and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life” (World Summit on the Information Society, 2003, pp. 1). Plus, the European Commission describes it as: “the society currently being put into place, where low-cost information and data storage and transmission technologies are in general use. This generalization of information and data use is being accompanied by organizational, commercial, social and legal innovations that will profoundly change life both in the world of work and in society generally” (European Commission, 1997, pp. 15).

Therefore, it is understandable that governments or organizations, want to make sure that they are not left out of the opportunities associated with the information society (Lallana, 2004). However, before governments or organizations proceed to developing plans and strategies for the information society, it is important to investigate the underlying key feature of this paradigm: information. Information taxonomies are intrinsically bounded to the level of abstraction adopted, gather of requirements and desiderata orientating a theory (Shannon, 1948; Butler, 2001; Floridi, 2003; Kornai, 2008). As a consequence of computer networks the available information increased exponentially, allowing that search engines become remarkably important.

A search engine is a program that sends a spider to “crawl” web pages, in order to extract links, and in return the information found on the page (Pinkerton, 1994). So far, search engines literature focuses its attention on the following perspectives: technology (Zien et al., 2006), user level of expertise and confidence (Teevan, Dumais & Horvitz, 2005), organizational impact (Wielki, 2008), and just recently power issues (Rieder, 2005).

However, the ethical impacts concerning informational fluxes versus control have been disregarded. In order to obtain a plausible answer concerning this theoretical gap, it is crucial to address control and its boundaries. Therefore, it is vital to perceive what technological means allow to control and monitor cyberspace (Glorioso, 2008), as well as, what ethical and legal dilemmas arise to society in case of overstated control (Jung, 2001). As a final remark, the authors will include Google as case study due to its remarkable excellence recognized through its market share, but also as a consequence of their personal experience using search engines, namely this.

**BACKGROUND**

**Information**

Etymologically information derives from “inform”, which means “to give form to, put into form or shape” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008). In fact, the earliest characterizing example of this concept in accordance to the Oxford English Dictionary arises in 1590, when Edmund Spense wrote in *The Faerie Queene* about “infinite shapes of creatures…informed in the mud”. However, the ancient Greek word εἰδὸς (“eidos”) denoted the ideal identity or essence of something in Plato’s philosophy. So, metaphorically “information”