Chapter 16
The Impact of Virtual Community (Web 2.0) in the Economic, Social, and Political Environment of Traditional Society

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ABSTRACT
The chapter enhances the scientific research in the area of the new digital era with a focus on diversity created in real society from the influence of social media. Specifically, it reveals the effects of social media on economic, political, and real society affairs. The latest riots in Middle East countries demonstrate that virtual social communities wield an influence on the citizens, and the changes they implemented show these countries will never be the same again. The effects of social media in real society are examined in highly developed countries such as the EU and North America (USA and Canada).

INTRODUCTION
The widespread use of Web technologies, especially in economy, society, and governance, creates an unprecedented volume of data and information, which are exchanged and traded daily on the Internet.

The recent elections for the U.S. presidency in 2008, as well the latest riots in Middle East countries with the widespread use of social networking tools and technologies (YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, etc.) have highlighted the powerful penetration of the Internet in the political process.

This raises questions as to the degree to which the real community affected by what happens in a virtual community.
The transition to Web 2.0 marks the transition to the age of Politics 2.0. The traditional one-way relationship between society and politicians gives way to a new form of “interactive democracy” dominated by freedom of expression. The ability to access (and use) a variety of information sources and Web tools allow the establishment of truly open processes and the export of meaningful dialogue. The potential political communities take the form of an inclusive public sphere, and new forms of political speech and action, influence, and political culture are created. By extension, new political-social-commercial-technological identities and relationships are formed, whose content and format is shaped and transformed dynamically in the realm of the social fabric and is mediated by both the limits and scope of the tools and by the willingness of users-citizens itself.

The first to record the phenomenon of globalization were Swanson and Mancini, who focused on political communication and noted that politicians and candidates in various democratic countries of the world follow common or similar election practices (Mancini & Swanson, 1996). These practices originate from the U.S., and thus this phenomenon was dubbed the “Americanization” of political communication. As pointed out by Kaid et al. (1995) today globalization means “Americanization.” This phenomenon is also known under the rather spicious terms “professionalism,” “upgrade,” “streamlining,” and “modernization” of political communication.

The main characteristics of this form of political communication is the dominant role of all modern media (Internet, email, mobile telephony, fax, etc.) in the development of a communication policy (Swanson & Mancini, 1996; Kaid, et al., 1995; Negrine, 1996). Nevertheless, each country simultaneously presents significant differences, as each country has its own distinct political and communication system and its own culture and social tradition.

Living in this new digital environment means that, in many countries, the typical twenty-one year-old has already played about ten thousand hours video games, read and sent more than two hundred thousand emails, talked on mobile phones for close to ten thousand hours and certainly watched TV for more than ten thousands of hours. It is obvious that he/she is socialized in a very different way from the immediately preceding generations. Thus, the main narration of life is no longer provided by school, church or the family but by modern digital technology. These young people are truly natives, indigenous digital natives as Prensky (2001) calls them, of the new digital world. A world in which the older generations can only be digital immigrants or even digital foreigners. E-mails, Blogs, Wikis, Massive Multiplayer Making on Line Games, Podcasts, WebTV, Web Radio are services that embody the concept of convergence in the everyday life of Internet users. Mainly through their experience of video games, many new users have learned to gather information from many sources and take quick decisions, to understand the rules of the game playing, rather than being taught by someone else or reading them from a manual, to devise strategies to overcome barriers to understanding complex systems, and to experiment on these with their cooperators. Therefore, the current situation is mainly based on data communication; its main feature is its communicative and participatory nature. According to Birney and Barry (2006), the publication achieved by creating a blog is due to the fact that users respond personally to the lack of pluralism that characterizes traditional media, which are controlled by a very small number of business groups.

It is understood from the above that traditional theoretical and empirical issues such as the social creation of reality and everyday life, power and society, identity and social dynamics, gain a new momentum, attracting research interest to the examination of the Web and in particular social forums. In this respect, the influence of virtual forums on the on-line Society, along with their legal, social and ethical implications, becomes