The modern alchemy and societal trends. Giving up ideologies and embracing digitalisation as a global philosophy

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Abstract: In this paper the author discusses the impact of information access, in combination with network structures and communications technologies, in the formation of social perceptions. This phenomenon is known as social computing. However, global access to emerging technology and easy user access to information sources are leading to new philosophical tendencies. Group behaviour and individual perceptions suggest that virtual influences and individual cognitive processes such as creativity and event perception are potentially determinants of new adoptions, as constructor elements of a new type of thinking. Finally, the author examines the impact of sharing personal experiences in the change of social values and norms from an individual to a global level.

Keywords: The fourth industrial revolution, globalisation, technologies, global philosophy, networking

Sommario: Nell’articolo l’autore discute dell’impatto dell’eccesso della informazione in combinazione con le strutture di reti e con le tecnologie delle comunicazioni, e nella informazione delle percezioni sociali. Questo fenomeno è conosciuto come social computing. Tuttavia, l’accesso globale alla tecnologia emergente e il facile accesso dell’utente alle fonti di informazioni portano a nuove tendenze filosofiche. Il comportamento di gruppo e le percezioni dell’individuo suggeriscono che le influenze virtuali e i processi cognitivi individuali quali la creatività e la percezione dell’evento sono potenzialmente determinanti di nuove adozioni, così come elementi costitutivi di un nuovo tipo di pensiero. Infine, l’autore esamina l’impatto delle esperienze personali condivise nel cambiamento dei valori sociali e delle norme da un livello individuale a uno globale.
**Parole chiave:** Quarta rivoluzione industriale, globalizzazione, tecnologie, filosofia globale, networking.

**Introduction**

The technological revolution in the last decades makes it difficult to imagine a life without the internet, advanced technologies and virtual interaction. And incomprehensible without platform services developed through applications and technologies. Additionally, the digital revolution has led to a mechanism that accelerates the pace of change and has reshaped thinking about real possibilities and limits. In all this, globalisation has increased the complexity of interconnectivity among societies and individuals to such an extent that time and space almost disappear. And it has made everything almost instantaneous.

For individuals and international actors these huge changes mean that information may be accessed more easily and cheaply and disseminated much faster. Humanity has become not just more interconnected but more involved in all domains. Everyone now has an opportunity to influence the system. The simplification of technology so that it can be used by almost everyone has put the transformation of creativity into innovation in the hands of all individuals and actors.

The boom in technologies and applications, has led to the development of new instruments addressed to the human needs and the solution of problems in a world which has become more complicated. However, dependence on technologies has increased the level of uncertainty in the world and made it more vulnerable than ever. But the new generations are more involved in solving problems and finding global solutions to the systemic problems than ever before.

This article sets out to establish under what circumstances technology drives the development of new social levels – a philosophical approach to community – in the international system. And how the new waves of thinking are related to the convergence of technologies. The paper present two links between this questions. Firstly, we analyse the meaning of technologies for international society from the perspective of globalisation. In this part we are interested in identifying the vectors which sustain innovation and why human society has increased the use of emergent technology in so many fields. Sec-
ond, observe how human societies embrace ideologies in the digital revolution, and how they understand the new challenges. Here we discuss the development of norms and values from local to global – in an environment, which is highly digitalised and sets the philosophy which guides the new generations.

**When technology became alchemy**

The strong diffusion of information from all domains and the large-scale adoption of technologies by society in terms of lifestyle experience, community and knowledge has led to the dominance of that practical dimension of science (Del Re 1997). In particular, elements that can create knowledge or innovative products, have proved readily applicable for aims other than scientific ones. The embracing of technologies has made a significant contribution to science development.

Over the years the border between science and mass involvement in the innovation process has become increasingly unclear. Now with the fourth industrial revolution, humanity has moved into in an unprecedented technological age which is inevitable transforming the world and societies. But this transformation comes with particular risks as well as opportunities. Broadly, the potential of new technology to be a danger or not is determined by the way it is adopted. For individuals, technologies represent benefits, change, communications, new abilities, and the element that can personalise the future according to their aspirations. By contrast, for policy makers, technologies describe new lines of power and influence, new geopolitical and geostrategic perspectives, and financial gain. This is the case with each new wave of innovations. The two centres often represent actual responses to emerging technologies as potential gains or potential dangers.

In its *Global risk report* (2006; 2017), the World Economic Forum developed two directions as possible scenarios for risk evolution: the rapid spread of misinformation and reduction of social cohesion or the weight of government under the pressure of the impact of new technologies. Technologies offer individuals an opportunity to control their own destiny, increase collaboration and offer the chance to create new ventures. But emerging technologies are not just a tools: learning machines and AI are able to run powerful algorithms
which solve complex problems; robots and AI improve performance in various disciplines and create new directions of evolution (Nanterme and Daugherty 2017). In this context the logical question is: what are the limits for the next step forward?

Historically speaking, technology has empowered human society throughout time, from the steam engine to digital platforms. But now it is different. The reshaping of information and learning machines offer more importance to individuals than to groups – a change which stems from the possibility to incorporate technology and algorithms into our life rather than embedding humanity into technology. Additionally, the development of learning structures, image recognition and contextual analysis increases interactivity between humans and machines. All this means that devices and new technological products are better suited and aligned to our needs and creativity. However, the ease with technology becomes smarter and more original does not correspond to Darwin’s mechanism (Arthur 2009).

In this context, corporate actors, especially those in IT, finance and communication, have a very important role, because in globalisation they are the main sources of technology dissemination through devices, platforms and services. So companies stand as one of the main vectors that offer societies and individuals the possibility to build personal opportunities, connecting their goals to global dynamics via technology. The attractiveness of this transformation from idea or ambition to something real is founded on the hyper-personalisation and digitalisation of general products from the global level.

It should also be borne in mind that unconventional actors are important because they represent the main source of development through the utilisation of products. And they are a crucial part of tendency to improve existing codes or create new algorithms and better performance.

A new path has developed, which in short time has become the present and future at the same time: the integration of reality in multiple apps and connected devices which work almost as one. This new approach allows people to organise their lives and work, to create and to interact with others in real time and to develop active-reactive behaviour. Through the integration of more technology and the empowerment of individuals to personalise the world for their own purposes, every individual has became a possible partner in the action of others. The barriers between different domains have become fuzzy
and every domain can produce effects in other domains. Through this, there exist internal transformations, a trend towards convergence and the amplification of technology on a global scale for humankind’s next step.

**The beginning of a systemic transformation**

At the same time as the digital revolution, rapid change has taken place in various spheres of social life, where profound transformations have occurred. Both process have transformed the abilities of societies and actors to interact, to create and to think in a relatively short time. As a result, interests, politics and ideologies have been directly influenced in a manner that gives more scope to public diplomacy, cosmopolitanism and new forms of expression. In particular, the changes stemmed from putting the neoliberal paradigm of politics and the international economy in a dominant position (Kelly 1999; Beeson and Islam 2005; Bohle 2006; Cerny 2008), along with social constructivism as a meta-theory about the social world (Risse 2007) and international consciousness (Ruggie 1998). Yet ideological components can still be found in political constructions, where ideological patterns supply an environment where foreign affairs issues can be distributed to international actors. From this perspective, Shaw (1992) argues that ideologies are assigned a role and an importance in social action only from a historical standpoint. So, ideologies express important truths and structural viewpoints for a historical period without this being able to be correlated with the future.

The effect of this is a complex asymmetric link between political paradigms and society’s perception of the international system which has definitely influenced group-individual *identity* and *social dominance* (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007). Therefore, the beginning of the digital revolution, when new interaction and socialisation instruments started to develop on a large scale represented emerging potential for the spread of new values, norms, behaviours and interpretation instruments. The consequence was a cultural convergence in a multi-dimensional framework which led to new trends and cultural waves.

This phenomenon spread to the technological dimension. It can be identified in soft power instruments which in practice made it very hard to distinguish the differences between cultural expressions (Nye 2002; Nye 2008;
Otmazgin 2008). Additionally, under the dynamics of digitalisation and globalisation, economic differences, political opinions and language diminished and ceased to be obstacles to interaction and the sharing of process on a global level. However, cultural values and historical memories continue to stand as important obstacles. In this context, human society has become more sensitive to the dissemination of information, sharing experiences, ideas, creative processes and problem-solving. Moreover, social and cultural philosophy can in the short-medium term determine different paths of evolution on a global level. This allows us to conclude that social closeness between different sets of values in the international system tends to become a characteristic for a new global philosophy through the expressiveness of societies’ connectivity to systemic interest.

Under these circumstances, the digitalisation of social life creates an alternative language and a new type of communication related to the virtual dimension and global interaction. Over time this has led to the formulation of a distinct type of interaction based on technological involvement which configures classical questions such as politics or security on a larger scale. Values and norms are thus transferred from national culture to the global sphere where they are reshaped by subjection to the intercultural interaction, which enables societies to be involved in every domain. The alternative reality so formed therefore creates a discrete order which is distinguished by interaction with local politics, economic systems and culture, placed on a world level. In this new background social relations are logically complex, which incorporates global sharing and a hyper-dynamic process of innovation. At the same time, the position of ideologies has declined in favour of the contradictory nature of cultural identities which capture the belief system appended to globalism.

**When technologies induce a new perspective**

Modern technologies, in particular those used for communication, redefine the fundamental process of global networks through criteria of access and accessibility. It thus gives the international system the character of a qualitative interface of bias between actors. So the accessibility of innovation and its propagation through digital technologies on a large scale have produced a new
platform for social and business networking (Vennoy and Palvia 2010). The peculiarity of this construction is obvious – the adaptation of a technology created to manage information as an engine for social behaviours. The strength of this link consists in the reciprocal action of social influence and technology adoption, which has led to a redefinition of the importance of social computing (Venkatesh et al. 2000; Lu and Yu 2005; Maruping et al. 2016).

An important role in this process is played by the media, which is one of the main constructors and distributors of information in social networks. According to Agarwal and Prasad (1998), individuals develop convictions about new technologies and indirectly influence the adoption mechanism by synthesising the data offered by the media. Through this, social groups restructure the image of space and the communication interface, characterised by systemic vectors of data flows. This offers society an alternative sense of space and place.

By this account there is an expansionist tendency in which communication technologies become detached from the symbolic spaces of local and regional cultures, to the detriment of global culture. However, there is an unimpeded circulation of information – data without borders and limits – in the pursuit of achievements in the new world. It is a logic which arises from the goal of creating a global programming and a global singularity of all domains – which already arose from the strength of global innovation and sharing of possibilities. It is also the logic of a new stage in globalisation, enhancing multidimensionality, detaching opportunities from specific contexts and pushing collective actions toward transnational structures.

Yet there exist another force at work, challenging the political institutional framework and reality – market singularity. Based on digital flows, this new force tends to flatten global markets, in particular capital flows. The effect produced by this shift is to enable individuals with less capital to reach the international markets. It was made possible by turning real capital into a virtual one with more power, using the virtual artifice. Nevertheless, the nature of this connection is grounded on the transmission of valuable streams of data and ideas with new risks and challenges. In addition, almost of every type of transaction creates new instruments which increase volatility and link parts of emerging technologies to digital flows.

This transition creates new value chains in hubs, research and in economic activity which make decision-making processes even more complex.
The openness which arises from this is the direct involvement of individuals in globalisation through running virtual or digital platforms to learn, work, showcase their creativity, and build personal networks (Manyika et al. 2016). Now this mechanism virtually underpins interactions within capital flows while simultaneously carrying a stream of creativity and innovation around the international system.

Against this background, platforms have an essential role in decreasing the cost of communication and transactions, also facilitating connectivity among actors from every part of the world. Thus, digital platforms reduce the scale needed to be global, enabling all actors to participate simultaneously in the biggest exchange, combining ideas with capital in an informational framework. Digital platforms and communication technology represent one of the keys of the new stage of globalisation. However, a diverse set of social groups has emerged from digitalisation which connects anyone, anywhere in a cross-border multiplex. This includes decisional support systems (DSS), artificial intelligence (AI) new forms of social networks, and different machine learning with online applications. They utilise algorithm constructions and run them adding new interactions which highlight the informational asymmetry which has changed social behavior.

**From ideologies to a philosophy of technology**

In their article, Keohane and Nye (1998) argued that the information revolution does not have the power to transform world politics because it flows in a space defined by politics, which does not allow the formation of a new politics based on complex interdependence.

Since then researchers have sustained the idea that digitalization has made the world a hyper-connected place which deeply redefines the relationship between societies and governments (Dutta et al. 2012) and where the flow is embedded in a space characterised by the antagonism of capitalist society (Fuchs 2009). Following this, capitalism has been restructured, making room for social networks characterized by strategic behaviour, the culture of technology and economic activity. This new form of society, with unlimited access to innovation through technology, has begun to undermine the institutional
framework and trigger a political change from the global to the local level. In this global change, the political community first became more robust and more compact, as reflected in the tendency of states to be affiliated to one or more *mega blocks*. Then, in its relationship with society the political community underwent a diffusion process, where political strength and scope are influenced by society’s perceptions in combination with external factors. And political organisation became a hybrid between institutionalised processes and social dynamics.

The source of this powerful change came from the middle class, which according to Huntington (2006) is the only element from the social stratification which has the strength to start a political change. In addition to the classical elements – mobility, the experience of growth and the expression of dissatisfaction – it gained the instruments to express a collective identity. This led to proactive movements aiming to transform the concept of political democracy asserted by the historical construction of sovereignty – in particular in the period of the Cold War. Under the assault of techno-economical vectors, global movements and the last two demographic cohorts, political ideologies and philosophies have been called into question.

Surveillance of political attitudes suggests an increasingly neo-liberal view of decision makers and society, sustained by disruptive international economic change and high volatility. However, the level of education of the new generations and an increasingly liberal approach to politics and economy, combined with a high of level communication and emergent technologies lead to a social liberal view. The significant difference between a classical neo-liberal approach in society and the new social liberal view differs in general from one region to another. Nevertheless, some patterns can be identified in the support for same-sex marriage, environmental issues, the legalisation of soft drugs, transparency in politics and free movements, a predilection for urban culture, social justice and healthcare, and education. All of these in essence are domains with a global impact which describes social issues of interest.

However, the majority in new demographical cohorts manifest a centrism in political-economic debate and have a low level of trust in governments’ ability to solve problems. This lack of confidence stems from the competitive state created by political parties and their inaccessibility; which leads to an aversion to political parties and their opinions. In particular, the possibility to
access information and check sources means that new generations to be more skeptical about political parties’ capabilities. But this does not prevent them getting involved in civic projects and having political attitudes based on information filtered through friends or group opinions – which do not disregard politics and highlight the distinction between political ideologies or paradigms and their political views.

Against this framework, the new generations centred discussion on social philosophy on a global level to the detriment of ideologies – as sets of beliefs and doctrines – induced by the new form of institutionalism. This reassessment is due to the fact that the globalisation of society structures integrate three new elements: supra-information sources, the convergence of cultures and the disjunction between local and global – especially for developing and emergent countries. Which works as a vector into the bias between influence and global activity, increasing sensitivity and the distortion of norms and values. Thus, for society and groups, planning based on probabilities has become almost impossible – the degree of difference being set by the position of groups in a network. Under such tendency, society’s perception of behaviour has become disarticulated by the alteration of the continuity between the logic of global dynamics and perception, and association with a particular culture. Therefore, the search for a purpose in life takes place in a reconstruction process of the self around the global experience shared through virtual space. So the social approach to reality tends to be around a combination between causal explanations offered by others and personal interpretations of factors.

While in the Cold War and in the following period expectations and possible achievements were constituted around the national ethos (the American dream, control of opportunities or loyalty in Asia), in a multiplex system, societies project their expectations through direct involvement, ignoring local limits. This represents the principle development of global philosophy by society. The ability to analyse information, sources, states, opportunities and outcomes across disciplines and in real time transforms the perception mechanism in an individual familiar with digitalisation.

At its core, the principle determines a social condition based on competitiveness and innovation which includes a high smart resources relationship. This exposes the decisive character of digitalisation in globalisation. In fact, this focus explains the need for change and how it is perceived by global society
by exploiting the opportunities of the present, with a particular attention to
temporal modes and the reconfiguration of the systemic interface.

The application of this imagination on global scale constructs the framework for a global philosophy based on the vision of freedom introduced by
globalisation that associates the concept of interaction with the expansion of
creativity for the individual’s own purpose. However, the effort to sustain this
new international perception goes hand in hand with political ideas which
refer to a reduction of government liaisons with business and industry, and
control over innovation and experience. It encourages the buzzword ‘attain-
ability’ with norms and values which seek to cultivate openness and to experi-
ence identity around the world.

We may conclude that what gives the new global philosophy its uniqueness and sophistication is its ability to absorb different and distinct elements
from conventional paradigms and configure new and distinct perceptions of
the global system. Embracing hyper-connectivity and idea of integration, the
fourth industrial revolution succeeds in establishing beyond “complex interde-
pendence” and “multi-culturality” an avant-garde process designed for broad
public neophilia. It does this by interlocking its two characteristics – social
condition, freedom and self-diffusion – and then clusters them to the adjacent
concepts of ‘technologies’ and ‘global expressiveness’.

Conclusions and remarks

In this paper, I question and examine some of the social consequences that
derive from the imbalance between technology and the perception of society.
Of course, some issues related to policies, the economy and social sphere
under digitalisation have been widely debated in reports and international
analysis. Nevertheless, the philosophical aspect of the waves of change has
somehow received less attention, although its effects can be felt every day.
However, given new trends in technology absorption and the digital revolu-
tion in social and world interaction, it is necessary to begin to understand how
this new stage of globalisation will affect not only the foundation of human-
kind’s set of values and norms, but also the impact of these trends on how we
think about and perceive the social environment around us.
At this point of the study, there remains the question whether the philosophy based on hyper-connectivity, hyper-personalisation, sharing personal experience globally and the involvement of individuals in everything can be sustainable and represent a beacon. To construct a pragmatic answer we need to agree that humankind will continue to try to evolve and through this will change the world at all levels all the time. A fundamental tendency is to incorporate technology and to see opportunities that derive from this as a success. But to incorporate innovation is about finding a better path in the next evolution.

I end with a brief comment about the relationship between social reality and peoples’ thinking in a super-connected world where the digitalisation of intercultural communication develops a new philosophical framework. Technology and the digitalisation of experience constitute in globalisation a new philosophical configuration that dominates our life and the perception process. Even more, they reclassify political belief systems and ideological landscapes. This tendency to redefine the identity and self of society describes an extensive reality of the present day, and calls for an alternative to the social behaviour and notions of thinking. The perception and assimilation of the new set of values and norms is a complex mechanism – in societies as well as in choices and the economy – a long, constant and sensitive situation. The sensitive degree of change and tensions between the old and the present, through to the future, is so difficult in dialogue because the framework which incorporates digital revolutions offers a huge set of reality imagery simultaneously for the people that sustain the current perspective on globalisation. On the other hand, these “conflicts” and the new framework appear in a context described through democracy and liberalisation. This diversity of reality imagery and the new thinking waves will be even more distant from tradition as people embrace even more opportunities for individual or group innovation and demand the reform of social institutions.
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