

SESSION 5

Presentations of Fellows' Research and Activities

Information Overload and Ignorance in the Digital Age

Ethar El-Katatney



I was born and raised in Egypt. I'm doing two graduate degrees right now. I graduated as an undergraduate three years ago, and I've also been working as a journalist since then. Neither of my graduate degrees requires a thesis, so I haven't been doing research per se.

The media is largely controlled by the state, but in a survey of 3,000 journalists in Egypt, 70 percent said that their biggest threat was professionalism, not government control. So journalism has a long way to go. But there are now more independent media organizations, and the state can no longer control what people hear and see.

From around 2003 or 2004, blogging became very popular in Egypt. The Internet population has exploded, many of them under the age of 25. This means they have access to information provided by nongovernmental

actors. People have put up videos of police torture on YouTube, and some have led to convictions, heralding a new era of social media in the country. Flickr, Twitter, and Facebook are now playing an extremely important role in the protest movement in Egypt.

The ease of access, the ability to be your own journalist have brought a full range of abuses to light, and this has led to tangible social change.

Of course not everything online can be used; you can't quote it as a source, for example, since there is fake information. But social media does provide tips, and you can get so much immediate feedback.

The Internet is often seen as a force for global standardization, but it's also given people access to sources that are not the traditional news agencies and media groups. For

example, a Gallup poll found that Americans with the fewest prejudices and who were the least stereotypical, particularly toward Islam, were the least educated, people who didn't get their news from traditional sources.

I'm now working with a group called Media Watch that monitors the news coverage of various media organizations. We analyze how

cultural perceptions frame the language of the articles that are written.

The potential of social media is that you can take part in shaping and changing the world. This is a huge responsibility, and those of us who are working professionally have to be really aware of this responsibility.

Beyond the Divide: Humanitarian Competition

Ichiro Sugimoto



Globalization is a widely discussed topic today among not just academics but also politicians and even poets.

Discussants broadly fall into one of three positions. The first group considers globalization as a positive and beneficial development. This position holds that it promotes democratization and a market economy also leads to greater wealth.

The second view is more neutral, seeing globalization as having both positive and negative sides. There are some economists who adopt this view, proposing ways to make things better.

The third position believes that globalization has mostly negative or undesirable con-

sequences. Radical antiglobalizationists have failed to produce a feasible alternative, however. Most proposals advanced are based on Marxist socialist models, which are not able to meet the expectations of the modern world.

I think the first view is slightly Utopian and does not give full thought to the complexities of the political and economic process. Notions of a pure market and perfect competition as conceived in neoclassical economics have no links to reality.

I think there is a need to think of more fundamental issues regarding globalization. We need a more humanistic concept that recognizes individual differences and their personal realities, rather than being caught up in abstractions.

Profit motive alone is inadequate to explain the human experience, for it arrogantly disregards local, traditional values. We must look at the totality of personhood.

A novel approach called “humanitarian capitalism” was proposed in Japan a century

ago. Humanitarian competition is an idea that can offer a moral frame of reference to temper military, economic, or political competition and may serve as a guiding principle to ensure social justice and equality while incorporating the energy and dynamism of competition.

Globalization: Good or Bad?

Heather Montgomery



Before we talk about whether globalization is good or bad, we have to define it. I consider globalization to be the broadening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness.

Globalization is not new; it's been around for thousands of years. In fact, the world might have been more global in the late nineteenth century. This was disrupted with the start of World War I.

The pace has increased, though, over the past three decades, driven by technological advances like media interconnectedness and also due to an increasing number of English speakers around the world.

There has been an intensification of economic, political, social, and cultural relations across borders. There is ongoing economic

integration, as represented by the European Union. Political relations are intensifying with the growing importance of transnational organizations like the WTO and international agreements like the Kyoto Protocol. There are also many more multinational corporations.

Because many of these multinationals are American companies, some people associate globalization with Americanization. This has led to charges of cultural imperialism. So globalization is controversial; in arguing about its pros and cons, it's often treated as a thing, although it's really a process. Recent arguments have pointed to it as an antidemocratization force.

Why is globalization so controversial? Partly because while it has the potential to increase economic growth, it can only do great

damage. Increased competition can mean that jobs are taken by someone else, where working conditions are not as high.

The most controversial aspect, though, is the flow of short-term capital. Globalization offers great opportunities for investment, but this can be very volatile, having a negative impact on poorer countries and—as the global financial crisis has shown—the rich ones as well.

Over the past several years, poverty has been declining. But the gains in economic growth have not been shared equally; the countries that have been growing the most have seen the levels of inequality rise.

The choice is between utilitarianism and the pursuit of the greater good. Economists tend to look at the world just in terms of utility, but I would like to take a stand on the side of the greater good.