



RESEARCH PAPER

Power and Interdependence with Internet

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ABSTRACT

The modern world is transforming all intellectual domains. This transformation is responsible for both convergence and divergence of ideas, their respective paradigms, and influencing spheres. Modern-day researchers and theorists have induced continuous efforts to redefine power, and the notion of interdependence, understand their meaning and practical interpretations and tried to develop a direct and more scientific approach towards these socio-political integers. Nevertheless, usage of the internet has expanded other grounds to underline extended dimensions of power and interdependence and explore their dynamics in a virtual age. What is the internet? How does it coincide with the structure of power and a socio-virtual world of interdependence? And how does it become a model of governance parallel to the real world? These questions briefly fall into the domain of this study.

Introduction

In the modern age, ideologies, and beliefs, and intellectual interpretations of political, social, and religious philosophies are undergoing significant transformation. Contemporary concepts and policies are rapidly changing at all levels. However, the concept of power remains at the center of political ideologies and theories. It is typically examined in the backdrop of a nation-state that has territorial integrity intact with all its important integers of governance. Hence, it has influence over the social mood, political ambiance, formation of defense and security procedures, construction of international diplomatic policies, and on all actors that are linked, nevertheless.

“Power is an indispensable part of politics” (Rana, 2015), and it includes numerous dimensions. Emerging concepts within the crucial paradigm have been widely studied by political theorists and social scientists. These concepts coincide with globalized power structures, in theory and practice. Although power remains under discussion, its dynamics are still studied, and applications are being explored

and discussed. But, among all concepts, two notions have gained foremost importance, i.e., soft power, and hard power (Raimzhanova, 2015). However, before presenting these notions into further discussion; it is meaningful that power is understood as described by political and social theorists and scientists. As there is a clear distinction between the perception of *power over* and *power to* (Iser, 2018). Both notions have different paradigms of discussion and synthesis.

Weber (1947) defines power as the freeness to establish the will. According to him, if a will is there, supported by the relative ambiance, and if it can be freely converted to an order, it is power; to which resistance has no meaning. Hannah (1970) describes that power has no sole proprietor and that the existence of power is directly proportional to the strength of its practitioner. Dahl (1979) studies power in the object-actor relationship, whereas the term can be applied to anything, or anyone dominates as an actor. Doran & Parsons (1980) state that actions in a system are brought forth to secure obligations by units of a collection. And if it can be done, the capacity to make it happen would be termed as power. Nye (1990) being the champion of the very concept, describes power as the ability to influence to get the desired outcomes. Besides putting these definitions together, there are different ways of seeing power as a tool of influence, i.e., both realists and liberalists intend to seek power but they apply it, in their own paradigms. Hence the manner of both insights would be distinct. Realists take power as the primary resource of authority which must always be aggressively applied; that all actions and decisions must support these applications, and that all the applications must gain desired outcomes. On the other hand, liberalists apply power through dialogues, and positive and negative sanctions, mostly carried by organizations and institutions, which gives rise to interdependence and globalization.

The last decades of the twentieth century have seen the rise of corporations, owing to technological advancement in the form of advanced telecommunication and transportation. During that time, first, electricity became the source of energy, also called the new electric feudalism (Keohane & Nye Jr., 1998), and eventually, it became a source of power. If we see deep, this is not the technological advancement that pushed the boundaries of conventionalism, made humans redefine social and political systems and restructure societal and institutional behavior, but it was only the electricity. Today's virtual age is a consequence of that electronic revolution. It reflects interdependence and a never-ending source of power. This is electricity that transformed the world of desires. The human quest for energy has always been at its peak, from petty interests to ambitions, and from basic individual necessities to social requirements of masses. The internet is nothing but a paradigm of power that was born to electricity. It is a transformation from the flow of electrons and positrons to the bits and bytes of machine language.

It was believed during the twentieth century that global politics would be reshaped by technological advancement. Modernists largely preached these ideas, which eventually compelled them to declare the world as a global village, especially when the "1970s saw telecommunications and jet travel ...and believed that the

territorial state, which has dominated world politics since the feudal age, was being eclipsed by non territorial actors like multinational corporations, transnational social movements and international organizations" (Keohane & Nye Jr., 1998). Especially after the cold war, states were beginning to depend on one another and even conflicting behaviors, and battles did not change the course of interdependence. "Interdependence does not only mean peace and cooperation among actors, but a relationship between actors characterized by cooperation, dependence, and interaction in several different areas, and conflict as well" (Rana, 2015). But does it apply to the matters and manners of virtuality in this modern age? The current study is a brief effort to understand the power paradigm that especially concerns virtuality in the shape of the internet.

Literature Review

Keohane & Nye (1998) explained how technology transformed the modern age, and how the ideas of conventionalism, rapidly vanished to give rise to modernist ideologies. They insist that energy resources, particularly man-made i.e., electricity, became the basis of what we are today, and reshaped our course of actions in a swiftly globalized world. For the current study, the expression of Keohane & Nye is significant. They are directly discussing power, its trickling effect as interdependence in the modern world, and the age of information. According to them, this is just a beginning of a highly advanced world, both politically, and technologically.

Rana (2020) analyzed the theory of complex interdependence. She elaborated on the continuous shift from hard power to soft power and figured out that the cold war marks the initiation of soft power. This idea could be accessed through economic growth and expansion as well as technological advancement. She went on to recognize and elaborate the situation between realists and liberalists, which could be called a tug-of-war between the notions of hard power and soft power. For the current study, the work conducted by Rana (2020) is substantial because it is deeply concerned with a proper understanding of the emergence of soft power and substantial increase in its acceptability. Today's liberal economy substantially increases the tendencies of interdependence and connectivity, while also suppressing the notions of enmity and conflict.

Naughton (2016) unlocked an interesting debate about the emergence of the internet. Naughton described the internet from the perspective of military and defense. He explained how the internet was transformed for ordinary public use after being extensively experimented with for military purposes. Although the internet has been used by the public for almost four decades now, it has always been setting fresh grounds for researchers, technology enthusiasts, economic geeks, political scientists, and social theorists to move beyond mere entertainment and ordinary information. For the current study, the work conducted by Naughton is important in two ways. First, the historical perspectives of the internet, and second, the implications of the internet beyond the military. Naughton (2016) came up with

three simple characteristics as a general-purpose technology to elaborate its significance, i.e., the scope of its vast usage, the capability of improvement, and innovation.

Nye (2020) elaborated on the situation between the United States and China, their manner of exercising power, their political-economic tug of war and means of their interdependence to fulfill regional and global objectives. Nye's ideas in this respect are of foremost importance, not only because he is an authority on the very subject of power and interdependence, but also because of his continuous struggle to understand the nature, and dynamics of power, and its distribution in today's liberal world. For the current study, Nye's articles and subject content are highly significant because of the modern-day description of soft power, which essentially becomes the mother of interdependence, and incidentally the internet, for effectively governing the virtual domains.

Material and Methods

This is a longitudinal study and deals with several points in time to understand how the internet emerged as power and what are the present situations and future consequences of the growing interdependence. This study analyses the connectivity element, and social aspects of the internet, i.e., the deepening of association of the ordinary humans with this type of virtual connectivity, their desire to explore more from this technology, and the satisfaction they acquire from using the internet. The current study is using a mixed-method to understand the internet and its social implications from the perspectives of power and interdependence, and not vice versa. A brief effort has been made to improve the clarity of empirical dimensions of power, interdependence, and their linkages with the internet using flowcharts.

Dynamics of Power

Power has its logic, and this logic is reflected by the dynamics it carries. Territorial power, for instance, has the same authoritative tendency as a transnational power may have, but practicing this authority would have different paradigms (Harvey, 2005). The changing dynamics of interpreting power gained pace after WWII, and more aggressively by the end of the cold war that cost the USSR the ability to sustain all its integers in a collective. The disintegration of the USSR, the emergence of east European countries as autonomous nation-states, and the reintegration of many east European countries into the European Union's collective, called for the political and conflict theorists to dive further deep into the concept of power that exists past the known domains of time, beyond all imaginations.

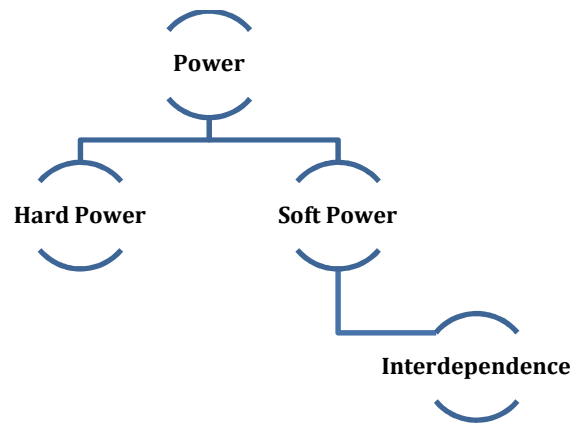


Figure 1: Dynamics of Power

Many theorists, including Nye (1990), studied power concerning the intangible sources to sustain it, i.e., institutions and culture, so it became easier that power can be categorized in two, like soft and hard. Hard power seeks the application of force, threats, coercive actions, and negative sanctions for the desired outcome. Whereas soft power uses normative integers, friendly domains, attractive policies, and positive sanctions to seek the most desired results. An example of this is the US that has passed through times in which soft power became a preferred way of practicing international relations, Clinton's reign for instance, and when harmony was preferred over authority (Harvey, 2005). But it is the power that persists in ways unknown to common authority because it finds its logic and defines its domains. It is important to note that a variable, tested to be the most powerful, has a very different social-political structure. As a multicultural society, individuals are linked only through a rigorous set of laws and not emotions, religion, or race, so even a little social disconnection from the law means a big disaster. This is where a 'powerful social containment field' becomes important; if it holds, the society keeps on working at its normal pace. It describes the 'nature of order and obedience, i.e., the power helps the law to hold and individuals to keep abiding by it (Harvey, 2005). However, the center of attraction of using soft power as a tool for successful applications of the actors is *legitimacy*, which gives rights to the actors and satisfaction to the beneficiaries of authority.

Interdependence

Reflecting a softer image of power and extending its domains to global social structures, interdependence is a multidimensional term, that gained traction with the emergence of the concept of globalization. It refers to a state, or a condition, that compels two or more actors to seek cooperation. For such cooperation, the absence of enmity is not a requirement. There are many examples of interdependence between fierce enemies, like Pakistan and India, China and India, and Russia and the US. The goals of this interdependence are to fulfill domestic and international deficiencies for national interest, and sometimes, international interest. The presence of Russia and

the US in the Security Council, where both take decisions together in international interest, and can also veto any move for their own or their ally's national interest.

The world today has mostly been eradicating the threats of war and becoming increasingly interdependent. Their actions are mostly based on the cost-benefit ratio. For instance, if a state must choose between war and trade and applying the statistical models for a complete understanding of both before deciding, the trade will supersede in choice over the war in most cases. That is why even enemies are doing trade, while the war of words also gains traction. This is because the cost of war is higher, and the benefit of trade is higher. The democratic peace theory and the McDonald Peace theory exist in almost the same domains, where political relationship and economic connectivity, both are eradicating scenarios of a possible war.

As an effective tool of soft power, the interdependence has shattered the isolation of introverted peoples and merged them with vibrant, dynamic, and socially linked societies. It relies on multidimensional mediums to avoid conflicts, increase connectivity, and inculcates multilateralism. Among these, the Internet is the most obvious, effective and resourceful medium that "frees us from geographic fetters and brings us together in topic-based communities that are not tied down to any specific place. Ours is a networked, globalized society connected by new technologies" (Dentzel, 2014).

The internet, coinciding with matters related to power, is a world of unknown depth. It is the most effective tool of connectivity in this modern world. It can also be designated as a doorway between traditional unilaterality and a multilateral world. It boosted interdependence and opened new horizons of connectivity and cooperation. Therefore, the virtual age has cut the distances short and challenged the hardships of the physical world with a counterbalance, depicted in the figure below.

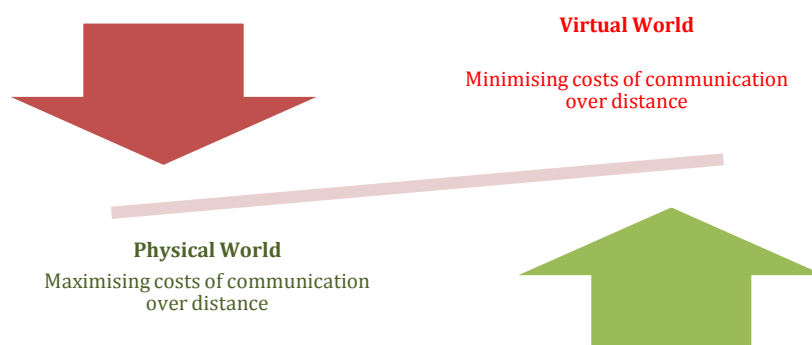


Figure 2: The counterbalance of the virtual age, derived from the concept of cost of communication over distance(Keohane & Nye Jr., 1998).

Power with Internet

This is the age of data, which is vast, extensive, diverse, and virtual, nonetheless. Massive data quantities are being explored by life and social scientists, political theorists, researchers, sociologists, doctors, and ordinary people. This data primarily include humans, their associations, interactions, and connectivity. One can argue about its cost-benefit ratios, which deal with everything that is potentially available virtually everywhere, from famous social media interaction portals, i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tok-Tok, to randomly accessed portals like millions of webpages on trillion of topics (Boyd & Crawford, 2011). Does it reflect the true form of interdependence in the modern age? Is there a virtual harmony between an ordinary user of the internet and a technologically and skillfully superior operator? Is the internet being used for the hegemonic desires of superpowers? Or has it been set free and fair for the benefit of all mankind? Does it compromise personal privacy? Does it have anything to do with the collection of your data that you hold dear and intend to keep safe and private? Connectivity is the heart of the internet that delivers billions of people to billions of people daily, and everyone out of these billions is playing with the information the way he can while being connected to as many devices as he can afford to use this knowledge in a more friendly manner. This is only the connectivity that gives us the power to cater this knowledge, and ironically, knowledge itself is power (Bolutife, 2019). "We have moved on from scattergun mass communication to a pattern where the user proactively selects the information they need" (Dentzel, 2014).

Cyberspace is the battleground of the modern age, and from battles, conflicts, and cyberwars, politics, diplomacy, social uprising, radical preaching, and everything that you can name, is happening around us, and many a time we become a part of it, intentionally or unintentionally. There are two primary stakeholders; on one end there are corporations (both public and private), governments and associated agencies, and on the other, there are virtuality conceptualizers, cyber non-state actors, highly skilled dissident groups, hacking geeks, and criminals, and between them, there is the ordinary user. Who wins in the end? An ordinary individual cannot even afford to think about this, because he is not one of either of the opposing groups and is not winning for sure (Prakash, 2013). So, what the internet, applicability of which revolves around the ordinary who gently uses it, blindly puts its data for either of the opposing groups to harness and pays for what it does in the middle of this ocean of virtuality, holds for him for the future?

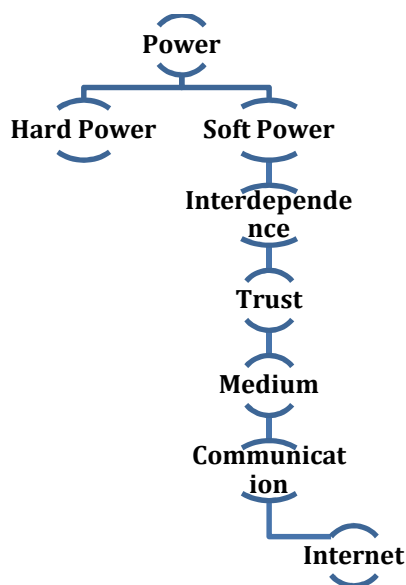


Figure 3: The internet as an effective hand of power

The Internet itself is power, nevertheless, for those who possess authority over it, their power is never shared, but it is increased after every new subscriber. The internet, with its own rules, turns out to be a government of the virtual world, as it has the same propensity of working. It has minimized conventional tools, and usual intellectual approaches, and maximized the futuristic desires of human beings while connecting them and bringing them closer, as shown in the following table.

Table 1
The power of the internet

Minimized	Maximized
Disunion and isolation	Interdependence
Unfruitful concepts	Productivity and profitability
Misuse of and monopoly over technology	Technological and energy utilization
Power of authoritarian regimes	Power of individuals to define a society
Costs	Efficiency
Disconnection	Connectivity
Scarcity/hiding of information	Flow of information
Bureaucratic authority	Civil input

The table above suggests that the internet does not remain a mere tool of information technology, but it is government itself, where the only differentiating function is virtuality. Yet, it has all the essentials of governance.

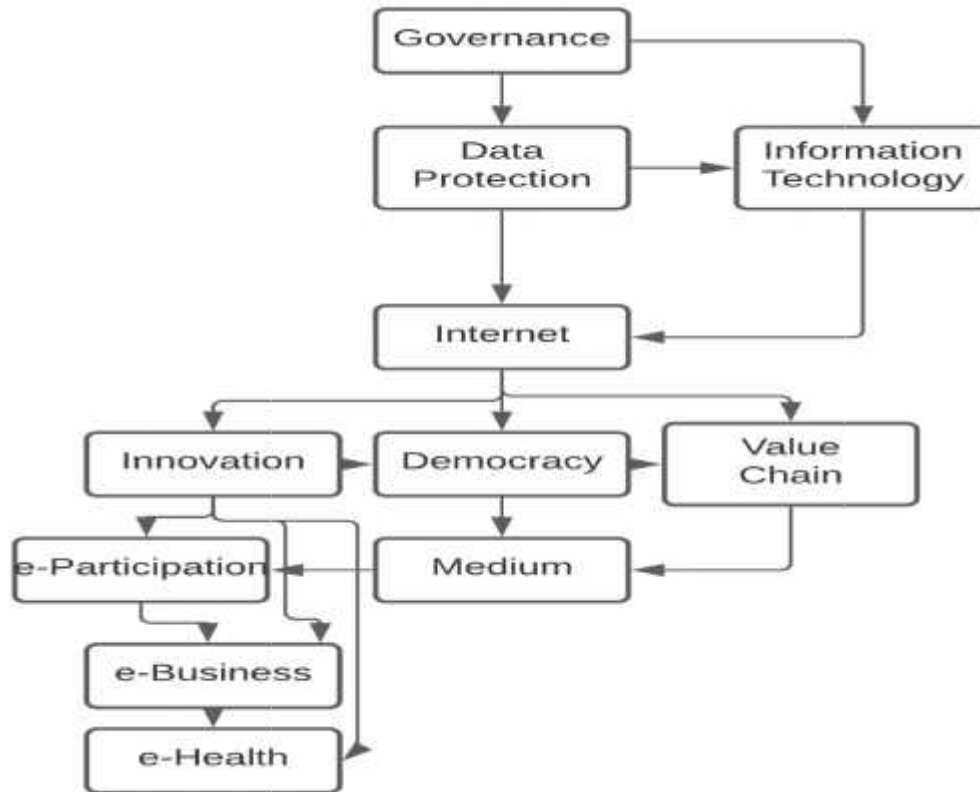


Figure 4: Model of the internet governance

Moreover, internet governance bears the following characteristics following the lines of the governance of a physical world. Like a liberal economy, the internet is based on rules.

1. The Internet has a global administration that governs, i.e., the mainframe.
2. It has its decision-making processes to define the input and yield the output.
3. The Internet has its terms of use, and a violation of these terms automatically becomes illegal.
4. It has its mission which, largely, is to facilitate the consumer through any possible and virtually legal way.
5. The internet is based on common economic principles which give rise to more complex business models.
6. The internet is communication that can be ceased for those who violate the rules, and the flow of information can be shut down at any time.

After much advancement in the field of information technology, we may still be at the beginning of the internet era, as it is opening new horizons for the ordinary public to get more from the deepening of virtual interdependence, i.e., mobile connectivity, fast-changing and impacting social media, growing innovative ideas in terms of technology, handling cybercrime, and new transportation, housing, and education platforms like Uber, Careem, Airbnb, EdX, Coursera, etc. (Naughton, 2016).

Conclusion

The 21st century is the age of information technology, which provides a borderless field to virtuality. The consequential subjects of this virtual age, however, can only be studied concerning the internet, which is the greatest tool of connectivity and interdependence. The internet has become so powerful that no activity is beyond its reach now. So, the power paradigms amid modern-day socio-political conflicts, their continuous and rapid transformation and the growing interdependence as a tool to part the distances between social, technological systems and communities, all should now be defined by nature and structure of the internet. However, the political domains of today require a much deeper study of the internet. Moreover, defining internet power structures is an uncharted territory, which needs extensive insights from political and social scientists.

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