e-G8 Forum Summary
Paris, May 24-25 2011

Plenary Session II: The Internet & Society

The Internet transforms everything it touches--how we communicate, market, work, learn and play. Some of the most profound changes involve how we organize into communities, re-envision government and share information. And that's only the beginning.

Key Findings

* Internet is no longer for just information retrieval, it makes possible overlapping communities in modes of discovery to increase influence and formulate demands.

* Global governance has to be based on cooperation because business alone cannot solve these problems, nor can civil society or government

* All technology has a tendency to reduce friction and costs, with great potential for promoting democratic values, but it can also be a harmful tool.

* The Internet levels the playing field for small brands competing against national brands by taking the risk out of choices for the consumer

Synopsis
The Internet transforms the way we communicate, market, work, learn and play. It has become an indispensable daily tool. With Wikipedia available in more than 200 languages, many people around the world are, for the first time, able to gather information which was previously unavailable; for some languages this is their first-ever encyclopedia. This has a huge impact on the world as we know it.

But the Internet has moved beyond information retrieval to social discovery—from being anonymous to having an identification. When you use Facebook and other social networks, you start with *who* you are. Social networks offer an opportunity to participate and the

power to influence. Thus the Net has evolved beyond information retrieval to social discovery. It provides the capability to form overlapping communities in modes of discovery, producing communities with voices loud enough to effect change. It brings people closer in.

Yet, as power shifts from the middle class to the young generation, the way the Internet brings people "closer in" will change. For example, traditional forms of political expression, such as voting, will diminish for young people, being replaced with alternative forms of expression on the Internet. Thus, the Internet will play a new and major role in defining governments, literally, on both the national and global stage.

Technology has a tendency to reduce friction and costs with great potential for promoting democratic values, but it can also be a harmful tool in the hands of, say, pedophiles or terrorists. The challenge lies in policing the Internet: where are the lines drawn and who draws them. Ultimately, governance will have to be based on cooperation, because business alone cannot solve the problems, nor can civil society or government.

New frontiers in commerce are ripe for exploitation. At present, only 5% of commerce occurs on-line, while 80% of disposal income is spent within a 2-mile radius of a consumer's home. Where small businesses previously could not hope to compete against large corporations, Internet has leveled the playing field. By providing well-researched information on small companies, Internet is taking the risk out of choices for the consumer, giving small companies a new edge in marketing.

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Session Panelists

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Stéphane Richard, Chairman & CEO, France Telecom - Orange
Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Facebook
Klaus Schwab, Founder & Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum
Jimmy Wales, Founder, Wikipedia

Moderated by
Maurice Lévy, Chairman and CEO, Publicis Groupe

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