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Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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● (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting 32 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We are meeting pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study of Canada in the digital age.

This morning our witnesses are from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada: Dr. Chad Gaffield, president; Gisèle Yasmeen, vice-president, partnerships; and Murielle Gagnon, director, strategic programs and joint initiatives partnerships.

We have talked about this meeting for quite some time and have looked forward to you coming today.

Along with Mr. Gaffield's introduction here today, our analysts have also done some background notes on new media. I think Michael has put those things together, and they're also in your package.

Dr. Gaffield, please take the mike. Thank you.

Dr. Chad Gaffield (President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada): Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

My colleagues, Ms. Yasmeen and Ms. Gagnon, and I are delighted to be here today to discuss this topic with you. We will do our best to contribute to your discussions and reflections.

[*English*]

My mission today is to share with you an emerging conviction that deep knowledge of and skills related to ideas and behaviour—to people, society, and culture—are key to the digital age of the 21st century. This conviction suggests they are conceptual and behavioural changes, and by better understanding these changes we can help make Canada a successful society in the rapidly changing 21st century in the developing digital age.

Specifically, I will emphasize and illustrate today three key conclusions of recent research findings. First, the new media are so important because they are enabling, accelerating, and interacting with profound conceptual changes. These changes are now defining the early 21st century as a truly new era.

I must say as an historian that historians are always very reluctant to emphasize change. We tend to emphasize continuity, but I'm here to share with you a conviction that the 19th and 20th centuries are finally coming to a close in the 21st century and we are embarking on a new era. These changes explain why the developing age is characterized not only by technological developments but also by economic, social, cultural, and political transformations.

The second conclusion is that researchers, students, and their partners across the social sciences and humanities are now at the heart of research and innovation as digital content and the use of new media become the focus of attention. From literature to philosophy, sociology to political science, communications to design, and law to management and education, Canadian researchers are leading global networks, in collaboration with colleagues across the campus and partners in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. This development reflects the new conviction that our capacity for innovation increasingly depends upon a constellation of digital technologies, digital content, and digital literacies.

The third conclusion I would like to share with you today is that the past and present ideally position Canada to play a leadership role as the first successful digital country of the 21st century—the first country to harness the power of digital media to create a prosperous and resilient economy, enhance social cohesion by connecting diverse cultures, build robust democratic institutions, and foster a safe and just civil society.

I'm going to unpack these three conclusions and provide you with specific examples and evidence to show that putting people in the picture, as I like to say, is the only way we can effectively move forward in the rapidly-changing 21st century.

Let's begin by acknowledging that the future has always been surprising. Sometimes the future is seen as an extension of the present, while in other cases dramatic shifts are imagined in ways that underestimate the forces of continuity.

One source of disappointment has certainly been the fact that the hopes for new technology have sometimes been quite exaggerated or simply foolhardy. Few predictions about how society would use radios, records, TVs, or telephones have proved to be accurate. Indeed, almost everyone agreed at the time that the birth of TV heralded the death of radio, and no one expected to see TVs hanging on our walls like large 18th century paintings.

But now we see that 41% of Canadians are watching TV online. Who knew that we would come to be connected, with phones in our pockets, seemingly unlimited messages and music—and now books and movies—whenever and wherever we wanted, alone or together with others, at work or at leisure?

A recent study showed that 76% of Canadians and 91% of 18- to 29-year-olds multi-task while online. Who knew that the distinction between work and leisure would become so blurry? One lesson of history is that technologies become important when they meet changing ideas and behaviours—when they enable and inspire new ambitions and aspirations.

Over the centuries successful societies have been nimble, flexible, and adaptable. They have changed in ways that built on their strengths to meet new challenges and seize new opportunities.

● (1115)

Today such characteristics are more important than ever, as three deep conceptual changes are defining the 21st century as a truly new era: first, a new recognition of complexity; second, a new embracing of diversity; and third, a new emphasis on creativity.

The new media are so important because they are enabling, accelerating, and redefining the significance of these three key changes.

Let's begin with the new recognition of complexity. We hear all the time that the world is an increasingly complex place, and indeed it is. The global financial crisis that began last year illustrates the increasingly complex world, as decision-makers continue to struggle to understand and act on processes that reflect values, technologies, ambitions, structures, psychologies, and policies in intertwined ways.

But equally important and of more enduring significance in our era is the growing recognition of the reality of complexity. The new recognition of complexity is redefining both how we think about individuals and their interactions with others, including, now, digital interactions.

On the one hand, new media are helping us come to grips with the complexity of human interactions through analytic strategies like data mining, text mining, and so on. On the other hand, new media are themselves increasing complexity as 20th century distinctions become less obvious, such as those between producers and consumers, between authors and readers, and as industrial-era definitions become contested. Who is an expert? What is authentic? Who is the owner?

In the recognition of complexity, we now know that building the future we want is not simply a matter of technological fixes, magic bullets, miracle drugs, or easy solutions of policy or practice. Rather, we now see that more often than not the significance of any action or technology depends on the relationships within which it is embedded.

It is in this sense that our innovation capacity increasingly depends on a constellation of digital technologies, digital content, and digital literacies in the form of talented people with a deep understanding of social, economic, and cultural complexity.

A special feature of the Canadian context is the central place of universities and research and innovation in contributing both the knowledge and the talented people who possess codified, embodied, and tacit knowledge to use technologies appropriately, talented people who are able to make the crucial small-scale improvements in product design, production processes, the management of knowledge, the types of services and how services are delivered, and how organizations are managed—indeed, in all aspects of innovation, including social and cultural innovation for the 21st century. This is why the role of the new media is at the heart of the new recognition of complexity.

Beyond the new recognition of complexity, we're now embracing diversity in unprecedented ways. Not that long ago, the dominant metaphor for thinking about society was a cookie cutter. A successful country was seen to need a homogenous population. Public policies tried to impose a one-size-fits-all standard for ideas, behaviour, and identity. Until recent decades, diversity was defined as a problem to be solved. In contrast, our era has now made clear that all societies have multiple origins, multiple identities, depending on who is doing the defining and what criteria are being used. We now recognize that no single perspective can hold all the answers.

Not only is the pursuit of uniformity often unrealistic and misguided, but we have realized that sameness can lead to vulnerability. Just as we now value genetic diversity, we have come to appreciate the strength and resilience of social, economic, and cultural diversity. In Canada especially, we live in multiple cultures, languages, histories, and perspectives, and we address the issues that arise from this diversity every day.

In other words, the hope for globalization in the digital age is not based on the imposition of a single model on the rest of the world. The desirable future will not follow a contest to determine superiority among cultures and societies in a zero-sum game. Rather, we'll follow a win-win effort to enhance all societies by drawing upon—increasingly through digital media—insights, evidence, and experience, regardless of their geographic origins.

In this sense, the new media are now deepening and enriching robust global conversations that reflect the increased internationalization of life in communities all around the world.

● (1120)

But in an unanticipated way, the new media are also reinforcing the importance of place, of context. As well as opening a virtual door to anywhere, digital connections expand and deepen connections made in physical space. Just think how much closer contact we keep with distant family members today than we did just a few decades ago.

At the University of Toronto, political scientist David Wolfe, geographer Meric Gertler, and other team members are undertaking an international study on the role of geographic clusters. These are regions where firms and institutions and communities involved in the same sector tend to gather together. Examples include Calgary's wireless industry, the biomedical cluster in Toronto, and the software and digital media cluster in Kitchener-Waterloo-Stratford. This research has shown that these geographic clusters are essential to success in the global economy. Place matters in the digital age, perhaps more than ever. In other words, new media are enabling, accelerating, and influencing differences, as well as similarities, around the world. The promise is a stronger, more resilient, adaptable world.

The third profound change that helps explain the increasing importance of the new media is the emphasis on creativity. The concept of creativity is often thought of in conjunction with the products and services of the arts, entertainment, and media sectors. Indeed, the digital age is dramatically increasing and renewing their importance in profound ways.

In addition, the concept of creativity now includes a wide range of other activities—in research and innovation, in products, services, and processes—throughout the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. Policies that support and stimulate creativity in ways that enhance economic productivity, competitiveness, and sustainability are now seen to be one of the keys to the prosperity of societies and cultures around the world.

Gerri Sinclair, who is one of the world's digital media pioneers, has developed a Master's of Digital Media program at Vancouver's Centre for Digital Media that embraces the 21st century approach. She states that the curriculum is focused on creativity, innovation, and interdisciplinary improvisation, so that the training the students receive allows them to adapt quickly to new ideas and new situations.

Creativity is also driving commercialization and social innovation in interactive ways. Indeed, customers in the sense of users, whether as individuals or as companies, are now seen to be driving commercialization and social innovation in the digital age. Their ideas, tastes, and preferences make and remake the market as well as our institutions.

This reality makes it clear that we need to understand society, changing tastes, and preferences, all of which can endure or change in unexpected and expected ways. The one special challenge for Canada is to stay in touch with the actual end-users of so many exports.

To begin to come to grips with the digital age our researchers are telling us that the new technologies are enabling, accelerating, and reshaping fundamental conceptual changes. They are engendering a recognition of complexity, an embracing of diversity, and an emphasis on creativity.

These conceptual changes are already evident in Canada and are rapidly changing the structures of our economies, our cultures, and our social organization.

Tom Jenkins, CEO of Open Text and a member of our council, uses a historic and compelling metaphor to emphasize the profound transformation now under way. He explains that:

> The Internet economy has thus far belonged largely to the toolmakers (some of them Canadian) that built the infrastructure that made the digital age possible. But the torch is being passed. The future now belongs, at least equally, to the tool users, the creative people, content providers, service deliverers, who have learned how to take images, sounds, ideas, and concepts and share them digitally.

The paradigm-shifting character of this transformation deserves emphasis, as we're now at a critical historical turning point, where we're seeing the convergence between science, technology, art, literature, and culture.

Let me illustrate quickly with a few examples how researchers across the social sciences and humanities are not only addressing the key questions of our era but also using and creating digital media to help Canada move forward successfully in the maturing 21st century.

● (1125)

Steven High, a professor of history at Concordia University, gathers personal oral histories of transformative social events that deeply affect communities in Montreal.The oral accounts are digitally recorded and stored at the university's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. Working with 15 community partners representing Montreal's diverse immigrant communities, as well as a range of heritage, human rights, and education agencies, the centre provides technical and research training on campus and in the community.

Ray Siemens, professor of English at the University of Victoria, is working with colleagues to build new knowledge environments. He and his team are studying how digital technology is enabling us to change in fundamental ways how we write, read, and record humanity itself. His research shows how the pace of that change has created a gap between our cultural and social practices that depend on stable reading and writing environments, such as print, and the new kinds of digital artifacts—electronic books being just one type of many—that must sustain those practices into the future.

To promote this kind of innovative research, our team at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council has recently launched, in collaboration with American and British partners, the “Digging into Data Challenge.” We are challenging researchers to come up with novel ways to tap into the digital data repositories around the world to enable new opportunities and promote international linkages.

Another feature of the new research initiatives is the redefinition of the curriculum in our schools at all levels. John Bonnett at Brock University is developing the 3-D virtual buildings project, in which university students generate models of historic settlements using 3-D modelling software.

Jill Goodwin, at the University of Waterloo's Canadian Centre of Arts and Technology, looks at how knowledge transfer and commercialization and digital display technology can be applied to the theatre and performing arts.

Such efforts remind us that the story of Canada as one of the world's most successful societies is based on a distinctive Canadian conviction that the building of a successful society depends upon public investments in the advancement of knowledge and understanding and the development of talent as a public good.

I emphasize this because often we think of Canada as being successful thanks to great natural resources, or perhaps the luck of being next to the United States. I say sure, they have been important factors, but what about Argentina, which is equally rich in natural resources; or what about Mexico, also right next to the United States? In fact, I would argue that rethinking Canada's success during the 19th and 20th centuries provides the necessary background for coming to grips with the digital age of the 21st century in the case of Canada.

Let me tell this story very quickly to conclude: I think chapter one of the story of Canada as a successful society tells of the establishment of common schooling in the 19th century across all the provinces that became part of Canada. Canada overall became one of the world's most literate societies during the 19th century, despite considerable periods of economic uncertainty, political instability, substantial migration, and competing internal and external pressures. The result, in this time, was that Canada developed a remarkably successful agricultural and commercial economy supported by resilient civil society.

Chapter two continues this story of Canada as a successful society by emphasizing the emergence of public universities in the late 19th century and into the 20th century. These universities remained small but have produced the professionals that enabled the growth of the institutions, services, and industries characteristic of modernity. By the mid-20th century, Canada had emerged from two world wars and the Great Depression as a politically sovereign country visible on the world stage. Canada's intellectual assets and human capital played a central role in determining this experience.

Chapter three then describes how Canadian higher education developed rapidly after the 1960s, as illustrated by the increasing number of degrees awarded during the later 20th century. Canadian participation rates at the undergraduate level rose. At the same time, the increase in master's and doctoral enrolment was also significant, though much slower.

One key development during this chapter three period was the building of a made-in-Canada research community. When Canada embarked upon reconstruction following World War II, Canadian universities were predominantly staffed by professors with graduate degrees awarded by foreign institutions, and they offered courses mostly based on imported instructional materials. In other words, Canada was an intellectual colony in many ways.

Over the past 30 years, in contrast, federal research initiatives and federal leadership have helped produce universities with vibrant undergraduate and graduate programs and robust research activities. Such investments have proven to be crucial, as other countries have increased their own public support for research.

● (1130)

Now, in the digital age, we are writing chapter four in the story of Canada as a successful society based on public support for developing people as citizens and as talented leaders across the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. In this context, becoming a digital culture, with ready access to Canadian content—historical, contemporary, economic, social, and cultural—is increasingly essential. Learning how to use, assess, and manage digital content now underpins Canadians' success.

For these reasons, Canadian content must be digitally collected, preserved, and made accessible to business, education, government, and society at large. The urgency of these issues is reflected in research findings that show that the digital divide has been increasing, particularly since the late 1990s. This digital divide reflects global differences evident at the level of continents in satellite photographs. But the digital divide is also apparent domestically, even within communities. For some, digital media are a great enabler and are a path to great opportunities. But for others, including parts of small-town and rural Canada and disadvantaged groups in all communities, the new media are not always generating a sense of optimism or opportunity.

The complexities of the digital divide, in terms of gender, race, income, aboriginal status, and community, is the focus of researcher Dianne Looker from Mount Saint Vincent University. The sociology and social anthropology scholar is bringing together researchers from Canada, Australia, and South Africa to narrow this digital divide.

The key point is that concerns about the digital divide are not simply about connectivity. More importantly, I think, they're about digital content and digital literacy.

[*Translation*]

Will the 21st century be the one that truly belongs to Canada? Or, in this digital age, is Canada at risk of becoming a colony again—this time a digital colony? How can we ensure a comprehensive presence of Canadian content on the digital world stage? How can we make Canada a robust, digital nation, globally engaged, contributing to international success in the 21st century?

● (1135)

[*English*]

History says yes. By seizing the digital opportunities, we can showcase to the world Canadian content, so much of which is internationally acclaimed, from literature and artistic expression to public policies on multiculturalism.

Canada has key advantages. Thanks to broadband penetration, talented Canadians are not just seeking information, they're using it and reusing it. They are interacting with it and with others. They are seeking to manipulate and comment on it, to rework it, and to create new content. Indeed, the world is beginning to recognize a distinctly Canadian way of understanding communication and the importance of communication technologies.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that we must admit that despite promising signs and the reality of our potential, Canadians are not taking full advantage of the digital opportunities, whether on our campuses, in our businesses, in our communities, or anywhere. We can and must do more. But on the path to creating the future we want, we must first cross the threshold of the imaginable. In other words, we must first recognize the challenge and opportunity of building a country in the 21st century.

Can Canada become the world's first digital country and therefore be a truly successful 21st century society? Who better? We have the technology. We have the know-how. We have the talent. But do we have the ambition or the courage? Can we dream?

Canada's history says yes. Indeed, the construction of railroads as a nation-building project in the 19th century provides an apt metaphor to describe the challenges and opportunities of the digital age. Certainly late-19th century and early-20th century nation-building in Canada involved railroads tying together the new country. But the last spike was only the beginning. Indeed, it was not the tracks, or even the trains, that made Canada. Rather, it was the content they carried, the people they carried: those who built the schools, businesses, institutions, and communities across Canada.

In the same the way, the digital infrastructure of the 21st century includes not only the digital tracks but also the digital trains. It carries information, ideas, commodities, and identities, connecting us and enabling us in new and profound ways.

Can we make Canada the most information-rich, information-literate country in the world? Can we be successful in identifying value in preserving digital information assets? Can we use these assets to educate our youth, to foster a common cultural identity and pride in our accomplishments, and to create new knowledge and new products that advance our economy? Can we provide ubiquitous and democratic information access for all Canadians to support our common goal of living in an inclusive and progressive society?

Yes, Canada's history says. We used to say that the future is in our hands, but now we say that the future is in our minds. The future is ours to imagine and create. We can make Canada a successful digital country in the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for inviting us here.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation.

We will go to the first questioner.

Mr. Simms, please.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Gaffield. And I want to thank you for providing some of your written material in advance. I read it—with great interest, I might add.

I want to drift away just a little bit from the idea of clusters and how we approach, from a human resource aspect, jobs and industry. I want to focus in on the cultural aspect.

We have a body by which we protected Canadian culture to the greatest extent we could. Primarily it was through the CRTC.

I would like to draw an analogy here. It might not be a good one, but bear with me.

Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin: everybody in Berlin knew what it was. They feared it. It was very famous for what it stood for, and that was the gatekeeper. When the Berlin Wall came down, it was useless.

That's my analogy with regard to the CRTC. With the advent of digital technology, our CRTC becomes that much more diminished. I'm very concerned about us as legislators protecting Canadian culture, first and foremost. I see it being lost, to an extent, through the advent of some of these technologies.

I always use as a litmus test my 15-year-old son. I watch him very closely, not just for the content of what he's watching but how he's watching, what he's using to do the watching. When we make rules by which he can see only Canadian content, or it's shown to him and other international content is left out, he goes to the computer and gets around it, no problem. He is a citizen of the world. He plays video games with his friends who exist in provinces that he doesn't live in.

My question then—it's a broad one, apparently—is how do we push ahead with policy that protects what we feel is Canadian?

● (1140)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: You're putting your finger on, I think, what is really at the heart of our new era.

I would wrap it up this way. For several centuries, we built an organized society and in fact organized countries on what you might think about as vertical structures—that is to say, geopolitical jurisdictions or institutions, a school as opposed to a hospital and so on. Our idea was that by adding up those vertical structures, this would be an effective way to organize our lives, organize society, and so on.

The challenge we're facing now, or the opportunity, is that the walls of those vertical structures on the one hand are becoming very difficult to maintain. In fact, they're becoming impossible, in some cases, to maintain.

A good way to think about this is to ask, on the negative side, how can we maintain the integrity of those vertical structures, whether we think about that as geopolitical or we think about that as institutions and so on? Another way to think about it is to ask in a positive way—I think this is what we're attempting to do now—how can we maintain the strength of those vertical structures but horizontally connect them in good ways? In other words, at one level we want individuals to be located in communities, in larger societies, and so on, in useful ways. But on the other hand, we want them to be able to be part of and horizontally connected to those elsewhere around the world.

How do we do that? My sense, at least, is that the strategy on the one hand is protection. On the other hand, it's encouragement; it's positive.

I guess that's where we're trying to figure out the new balance here.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's the heart of it, right there. It seems to me that the future discussion wades into maybe less regulation—I'm not suggesting that this is what we should do—and more towards the promotion of our content, of what we feel is good Canadian content.

I like the fact that living in Newfoundland, I can hear about, read about, and view other aspects of this country freely, without being swallowed up by all kinds of crime shows that exist around the world. I think you know what I'm getting at.

But some of the things—

The Chair: Very short, Mr. Simms, please. We're at five minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay.

You talked about a paradigm-shifting character. When it comes to things like copyright, artists have to be paid for the work they do in order for them to continue on. I think you know what I'm getting at. That's a problem we also have to deal with, how you compensate people who provide the content you watch. But in this age it's just so hard to create a paradigm to create revenue.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: And that's the challenge of our times.

There is the distinction, for example, between the author and the reader. Now we know that in the digital age, for example, readers are being invited to become authors. And the distinction between the authors and the readers starts to get all mixed up, which is what you're suggesting in terms of who owns it. We see lots of examples of this.

For example, with the new e-books, these new knowledge environments, the idea is that you buy a book and then you can become a character in the novel. And the software is set up to enable this. Well, now it gets really tricky here. Whose book is this now?

We're now just realizing how deep this goes in terms of a lot of our assumptions. Basically, I would say that since the Enlightenment, 300 or 400 years, we've been working toward a model that really became legislated and so on in the 20th century and that all of a sudden started to crumble on us as that horizontal connecting started to become so important. And so we're trying to get the balance in our society between....

At some level, protection is always going to be there. We're going to want to protect. On the other side, we're going to want to promote. And how we do that effectively is really the challenge.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lavallée, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): My first comment is directed to you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gaffield's speaking notes were handed out to us, but there are no separate French and English versions of the text, only a bilingual version. According to the rules of our committee, this is unacceptable.

[*English*]

The Chair: I understand that, but I probably learned more French this morning by following the text.

I again asked the clerk. There's no English-only text, so I followed it in French. I accept that. As I say, I think I learned more French this morning than I have in a long time.

So let us, around this table, accept what we have here. If you want to put it under your desk, I think you can.

I thought the—

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): But that's not the point.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: You heard more French than English. You're better than me. I heard more English than French.

Regardless, that is not the issue. This committee operates on the principle that documents are circulated to committee members in both official languages, not in a bilingual format. That means two documents, one in English, and one in French.

[*English*]

The Chair: We understand that. I do take that seriously. But at the same time, I would hope that's not the main question and that we could have some questions for Mr. Gaffield.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Indeed.

[*English*]

The Chair: If everyone would like to hand in their—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: For me, it's an important matter of principle.

[*English*]

The Chair: I do understand.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: All the more so, given that one month ago, as you know, we received a motion from a colleague on this committee written in very poor French. I wouldn't want us to be headed down that road. I apologize for the comment, but you have to understand that for me, it's an important matter.

I listened carefully to your comments, Mr. Gaffield. I have read the notes prepared by the research staff at the Library of Parliament. They did a good job and sent them to us in both official languages. As I was reading the documents, I got to thinking that if the word "digital" was deleted from the text, the notes would still make sense.

For example, according to the notes "the digital age is characterized by economic, social, cultural and technological transformations". The text could just as easily have said "the age of mass media". Throughout the text, the words "mass media" could be substituted for "digital". The notes go on to say this: "Innovation relies on a mix of digital technologies, digital content, and digital literacies". Here too, the expression "mass media" could be substituted for the word "digital", and the effect would be the same.

How are digital media different from traditional media?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: That is an excellent question. To respond to your comment, we do have separate French and English versions of the document. We can get them to you right away. They do exist.

There are two points to consider here. Firstly, things move much faster today than they did in the past. In that respect, communication is faster with new media, whether we are trying to reach someone or send a message. It's a matter of speed. Secondly, and more interestingly, new media open up possibilities that did not exist with traditional technologies and media. The whole dynamics shift. Earlier, I gave the example of a reader who can become a character in a novel. That is unprecedented. Activities like...

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but my time is limited, as you know. We've already seen where someone could become a character in a novel. There were several books in the "Le livre dont vous êtes le héros" series, which for that matter was not available in digital format.

Earlier, you mentioned copyright. I always draw a comparison between copyright and the situation of the builder of an apartment complex. While he may rent out the apartments, he still owns the building. Just because a tenant decides to repaint a wall doesn't mean the wall suddenly belongs to him. It's easy to find the author of the book in which we are the protagonist, whether that book exists in traditional or digital format. Copyright must be respected.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Regarding the virtual novel, the difference is that with new media, the format is dynamic compared to the actual book. I experienced this with my children. They could decide how the story would unfold. With new media, a truly dynamic, individual approach can be taken. They open the door to unprecedented possibilities.The whole dynamics are completely different.

I'll give you another example. I'm a historian. When I first started out in the profession, it was impossible to carry out with a pencil and paper the kind of analyses that we do today, to create databases, to analyse demographic and cultural trends, and so forth. I think the two can work side by side. Unquestionably, there is some continuity, but at the same time, new dimensions make the process more complex and this explains a little why new media are becoming increasingly popular.

● (1150)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Chair: Please be very short.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Are you calling into question copyright?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Absolutely not, in that we need to strike a balance between copyright and people who have truly created something. Right now, this is a complex issue. As I said, the divisions between creators and consumers are much more complex than they were in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The line of questioning today is really establishing the difficulty for us as legislators in getting our heads around where *we* belong in this universe.

When I was first elected to Parliament, there was almost a panic on the Hill about digital culture. It was this great threat that was going to destroy everything we ever knew and everything that was good.

At that time, Laurier LaPierre's report came out, *A Charter for the Cultural Citizen Online*. I thought it was one of the most profound things I'd read on where we could go as a country in fostering.... He wanted to move the discussion from online consumers to our being cultural citizens in a democratic digital world.

Nothing seems to have happened to that report. I've put it down to the fact that it's a "big visioning thing" looking at things in a completely different way, which isn't something we're very comfortable with in the parliamentary realm, so it was put off to the side.

The other analysis of the time came from the famous lobbyist—I won't name him, but I'm sure we've all met him—who asked me if I knew what the Internet was. I never answer those open-ended questions, when a lobbyist asks; I always want to hear what they're going to say. In my mind I was thinking that the Internet might be the greatest possibility since the Library of Alexandria. No, no, he said; the Internet is a highway of stolen goods and child pornography that goes into every child's bedroom in Canada, and what are you going to do about it?

This is, I think, the question that's put to us as parliamentarians. We're good at being reactive, we're good at seeing a threat, we're good at saying that something has to be done. And my concern—you're a historian, which is why I want to hear from you on this—is as follows.

The roller piano was denounced as a threat to musicians and had to be stopped. The record player was a threat to music publishers and had to be stopped. AM radio was a threat to the recording industry that made the record players, and it had to be stopped. FM radio was a threat to AM radio, and it actually was stopped for 40 years. Sony was a threat to Hollywood—Sony was the Boston Strangler of innovation, according to Jack Valenti—and now Sony is suing teenagers to stop the threat to music.

Now, today, we have Google, which broke copyright laws. YouTube was a pirate haven. And then, just this week, the film and television producers said we can't stop the development of BitTorrent, because it is potentially a great new source for getting our movies out. Everyone remembers that two weeks ago BitTorrent was probably the biggest pirate threat in the world.

Where do we come down, as legislators, on the issue of protection and innovation? We're always being asked to stop something. We don't seem to have a framework or focus on, for instance, how do we ensure digital development and not stop technologies that are happening that might end up benefiting our artists?

This is the question that we ask ourselves, and I think most of us are kind of at a loss.

● (1155)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: You're emphasizing two key things.

First is the notion that technologies have been characterized as either a threat or, I would say also, as a panacea. A key message today is that in and of themselves, they're neither. It's how they're used, what they're used for, and so on; that's where we have to get the emphasis.

My sense, at least, is that like everything, they can be used in ways that help us, ways that do not help us at all, and so on. My sense is that all the dire predictions miss the fact that the issue is not the technologies in and of themselves; it's the use they're put to. And I think your examples indicate that.

The other thing I think you're also suggesting is the context of what the economists would think about it, supply and demand. Demand is back to ideas and behaviour: people demanding. If people are demanding, then the supply side starts to react to that. It's a question of trying to think that through in terms of the new media and the examples today.

My sense is that the new dynamic we're really wrestling with is the ease now of horizontal connecting and how we do it. Certainly in the past all the issues you pointed to were there, in the 19th century in those debates about how the different media would trump each other. It has turned out that in fact we're reading newspapers today. They're threatened, but we still have them today. They became popular in the 18th century. When TV and radio came in, no one was supposed to read any newspapers anymore.

It seems to me that the issue is back to how the different technologies fit into people's lives, why they want them, and what they are doing with them. It's about the content of them, how they are using them, and so on. That's the issue.

The focus on the possibilities of use is really at the heart of a lot of the legislative challenges. The actual technologies themselves have been changing so rapidly that this focus, it seems to me, is in some sense less important than the focus on why and how people are using these communication devices.

Mr. Charlie Angus: To look at it in terms of an economics argument, Clay Shirky, who has written *Here Comes Everybody*, says that revolution doesn't happen with new technology when it's exciting; revolution happens when the technology becomes boring, when it becomes everyday, and this is what we're seeing with the Web 2.0 world. He identifies it as an issue of cognitive surplus.

For example, sure, on the Internet ten million people are putting their baby pictures up on Facebook, and it's very mundane. But if 5% of that cognitive surplus is building something, it has revolutionary impact—for example, Wikipedia. Flickr has changed the photography industry completely just because there are ten million photos, and nine million might be bad, but one million are incredible. Then there are the genealogical records.

Shirky's saying that we're now on the verge of this sort of wiki building, of everybody building. There's no longer the “great man” or “great thinker” idea. He's saying that this is now going to be the industrial model for development, for research; that we're moving toward this kind of wiki online involvement of everybody in how they're using technologies. Five years ago, we couldn't have seen wiki doing what it has done.

Again, is there a role that we have to play as parliamentarians in order to facilitate what could become a very complex but very phenomenal innovative revolution?

● (1200)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: It's such an interesting phenomenon. What you're suggesting there is the new kind of horizontal links between individuals.

Now, rather than me as a creator imagining a contribution or particular project as a stand-alone, increasingly we see a collective effort at some level and see how we're moving ahead not by relying on one brain but by trying to piece together and connect the input of many brains—a collective wisdom, which is what the wiki phenomenon is really tapping into.

On the side of creativity, on the side of innovation, and so on, a lot of businesses—and certainly we at our research council—are increasingly not seeing the great experts in how the organization should move forward as being the president and vice-president; rather, now we're looking to the entire organization, as well as partners elsewhere.

This is a profound change. For two or three centuries we developed the notion of the expert who was going to get great ideas and then feed them out into the world. Similarly, on the economy the idea was to build the great product, and then your key would be to get great advertising to convince people to buy it. Now there's what we call the customer-driven marketplace, where the folks are not experts in a corner trying to decide what society needs, but are out there attentively listening to what today's preferences are, how people using this tool, and so on—actively engaged, such that the consumers, the customers, are now driving, in an unprecedented way. The issue is no longer using advertising to convince people as much as trying to pick up on what those preferences are and how you can meet them.

So it's such a different dynamic. That's why they talk about the flat hierarchical structures now, which really want to call into play the talent, the potential, the insights and perspectives, this diversity idea in which you're pooling from as big a *bassin* as you can.

The Chair: Thank you. We went a little over there.

Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Thanks very much.

Thank you, Mr. Gaffield, for your presentation.

I think what I'd like to do ideally is set two issues aside, one of which is the issue of intellectual property rights and copyright, and say, okay, we're going to deal with that. The government has been looking at that. We've had broad consultations, and I think opposition members as well have been looking at that, and obviously looking at how we're going to address the issues around intellectual property rights and copyright law in general. I want to set that aside.

What I want to talk about is the opportunity that new media presents, because I think that's what you got into, and I hope that's where this study is going. There are those who are afraid of change, frankly, and I think we hear an awful lot of messages from those who are afraid of change. Certainly, new media presents significant change, and you've referenced that a number of times. We're talking about significant differences and so forth.

To steal a line from one of my favourite shows, *Star Trek*, I want to boldly go forward with this and look at what's possible. I think it's just incredible that we live in an age where anyone can be a broadcaster, anyone can be a recording artist. And anyone can send that message out globally. We're not limited by antennas. We're not limited by frequency. We're not limited by borders. I think it's such an incredible opportunity.

Within that context of opportunity, I'd like to see this committee undertake a study whereby we really analyze the opportunity and we get at how we can give Canada an advantage moving forward with this new technology, with this new media—if it's even new anymore. I think what we're talking about is digital media, and it's not that new.

To Charlie's point, I think in regard to a lot of the things that we're talking about as new, for a few folks in here, we're not as young as we used to be. By the time I see something that's new, somebody else has already mastered it.

What should our terms of reference be, in your opinion, if we're going to give Canada an advantage moving forward so that we're ready to take full advantage of the opportunity that this digital presents to us? I'm less concerned about whether or not we can protect Canada's identity and more excited about the opportunity that Canadians can actually reach the globe with all the talent that we have.

● (1205)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: It's so important, because the words you're using—opportunity, promotion, encouragement, and so on—strike me as being at the heart of it.

The way I think about this is those three sides. Definitely on the technological infrastructure, that has to be in place, but the two other sides I like to call digital content and digital literacy—in other words, the notion of Canada occupying and contributing to this global content, the presence on the international stage. I think Canada has a world to offer on that scale.

At the same time, on the digital literacy side, how we access, how we use, how we reuse, how we actively become real leaders, I think that also needs fostering. It seems to me that enhancing the content, enhancing the digital literacy side in the sense of seizing opportunities, promoting, and encouraging, is really the side on which we can get beyond the idea—which I think is really an old-school idea—that we're going to be able to really effectively stop change, contain, homogenize. It's complexity, it's diversity, it's creativity. How can we foster those in the digital content and digital literacy side? That seems to me to be key.

Obviously, we need the connectivity, we need the technological side, but it seems to me that the heart of this is seizing an opportunity for Canadians to really become active on this global new media world stage.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Okay.

As a follow-up, because I want to be clear about what I'm saying, I think we Canadians are extremely secure in our identity. I think we're a whole lot more than a country that plays hockey and goes to Tim Hortons before we go to work. I think Canadians have a good sense, culturally, of who we are.

I think we're making incredible contributions. I think no matter what genre or industry you're looking at, Canadians are leading in a lot of them. Certainly if we look at music, for example, we have Canadian vocalists, women and men, who are chart-toppers on both sides who are selling millions of copies; we have actors, women and men, who are lead actors in Hollywood but also lead actors in other places around the world.

I think we're pretty secure in that, which is why I'm now looking at this opportunity and saying "What is the next step?" I didn't get a real sense from you, and I guess what I'm asking you is, if possible, to kind of dumb it down so you can say to us "I would suggest that you start by looking at *x* and move on to *y* and then try to wind up at *z*".

We're at a point now as a committee where we're trying to determine what the parameters of our study are. What exactly are we trying to accomplish? If we're looking to advantage Canada as a leader or at least on the front of the wave when it comes to digital media, how should we be doing that as a committee?

I would like to see this committee come forward with solid recommendations for the department and for the government as to how we're going to advantage Canada, how we're going to put Canada in a place whereby we can really take advantage of this digital transition and really see our own economy and Canadians benefit to the full extent.

● (1210)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: I'm going to turn to my colleague, who will give you a little hint of the quality of Canadian participation as evidenced by an international research competition.

Before I do that, let me say a word in response to your interesting question. I guess the thrust of what I'm saying is let's take for granted that technological changes in terms of speed, of capacity, and so on are going to continue. So let's just take that as a given, that the technology will be able to enable faster, more intense communications.

Then the question becomes, okay, what do Canadians want to do with this? What are some of the directions? And how can we enable and help Canadians do it in ways that fit the kind of values we have around the just society, around an inclusive society, around the kind of being Canadian that I think we embrace? So that's the digital literacy side.

My sense is the technology is going to keep changing, with always something new, but it's all going to be in the direction of speed and capacity. Then the question becomes about use and the ability to use it in ways that suit us as Canadians.

Gisèle, perhaps you could speak to the quality of this.

Ms. Gisèle Yasmeen (Vice-President, Partnerships Directorate, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada): Dr. Gaffield is referring to our Digging into Data Challenge, which we've developed internationally with partners in the U.S., the National Science Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and with a very interesting organization in the U.K. that this committee may want to look at called the Joint Information Systems Committee. This is a grouping of various government departments in the U.K., the BBC, the granting agencies, and other stakeholders interested in this whole area of making new media, making content available, and the literacy issues that the president was referring to.

Looking at the discussion, I would encourage you to look at the work of JISC, the Joint Information Systems Committee, and what they've done. I think the conclusion of our collaboration with the Americans and the British is showing that Canada is positioned for great global success in this area. This was a small undertaking and the Canadians, through modest investments at SSHRC, were really at the lead, despite the fact that I think the understanding is only about 2% of Canadian content is online at the moment.

That's really where the potential is, not just in scholarship but in the interfaces between universities, institutes of higher education, the media, and public-private and not-for-profit sector partners. That's what we're seeing emerge as a result of this. Of course, there are a number of pockets around the country of strength in this area.

The Chair: Thank you.

We went off our timing a wee bit on that first round. I'll try to even it up. Let's try to stay with five minutes for questions and answers.

Mr. Valeriote, please.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for that very thought-provoking presentation, Dr. Gaffield.

I come from an education background. I was on the school board in Guelph for 18 years. So I always worry about disparities being created between people—affordable, accessible, all these issues.

I remember when we bought our first word processor at my law firm. I paid $12,000 for it. It was an AEG, and I had to have it covered with a glass case because the printer made so much noise.

I do concern myself that this is a possible cause of disparity. We assume that everybody carries these around with them. They don't. We assume that everybody has access to a laptop. The decisions we made at the school board were, “Is it musical instruments, phys ed, or computers?”

I'm wondering if you could spend your time—because literacy is important in the digital age—on whether you think there's going to be a greater gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged because of a lack of access to everything that we assume is accessible and affordable.

● (1215)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: It's such an important question.

I think during the 1990s, the talk about the digital divide, which had come out very early, quieted down. People went down another path—namely, it's democratizing, it's an equalizer, anyone can get access to this huge library, you don't have to be in a big city.

That has started to change now. In the last 10 years, the debate has gone much more down the direction of how those who have the skills, the literacy, the access, and so on are really just starting to separate from those who do not. The digital divide talk is back. Now it's suggesting that it's perhaps far worse, even, which poses some really interesting questions in terms of social cohesion, cultural cohesion, and so on.

My sense is that we have to start paying a lot more attention to this. The fear is that is the dream of the democratizing, equalizing notion of access to information and so on...that those who are able to may, in fact, be able to just run that much faster and further ahead.

So it's a big issue.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I'm hearing you say that it's an issue, and therefore a gap must exist. I'm wondering if you could offer one thought on that. How do we close that gap?

Secondly, do you see broadband as a right?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Interesting; actually, we were having the wireless discussion, and I know cities now that are making their cities wireless and so on as a way of attacking this.

My sense, at least, is that it's become a key issue of social, economic, and cultural integrity in the country now. I'm not sure where to draw that line, but there's no doubt, and we see it in universities and so on, that those with the access and ability to communicate using the new media have a huge advantage. I think this is a real issue for our schools and for our society.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Again, on broadband, I understand that Finland may have just passed a law that broadband is a right. I'm not sure of the accuracy of that. Do you know anything of that?

As well, do you consider broadband to be a right?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Increasingly, I think, societies are embracing the notion that connectivity is essential. On the content side, increasingly, as Madam Yasmeen was saying.... You know, 1% of Canada is on the web. Countries like Finland, for example, are very concerned about that.

Then there's the literacy side. It has to be, it seems to me, an integrated approach in which, yes, we have connectivity, but we also can access and create the content and have, similarly, the skills to be able to use it effectively.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Do I have any more time?

The Chair: Enough for a very short question and short answer, please.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Okay.

These are a couple of your own suggested questions: "What is the federal government doing to help those creating and distributing Canadian content through digital media?", and "What else should the federal government be doing?"

Can you answer that?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: It seems to me that what we've seen—again, my chapters are the history of Canada—is that the federal government has played a real leadership role, I would say starting after the Second World War, in the notion of moving Canada to this knowledge society culture and so on, and investing in a domestic research infrastructure.

You know, when I was a student at McGill in the late 1960s, almost all my professors had gotten their degrees from outside Canada. Almost all the material we used, in fact, was imported. Out of the 22 historians in the department, two taught anything about Canada.

So it's a recent phenomenon that the federal government showed real leadership, saying that in order for this country to really blossom and flourish, we must in fact now create the content, create the understanding.

It circles back to what I said, that place—surprisingly, in the digital age—now matters even more.

There was a book in the early 1990s called *The Death of Distance*; it said it didn't matter where you were, and we started to go down that path. It turns out now that in fact physical contact is the key and we're using the new media, the digital age, and so on, to enhance and enrich and extend physical contact. If you do not see someone physically on a reasonably regular basis, in fact you stop communicating with them through the new media, and so on, and those connections start to be broken.

That's really interesting in terms of how we now think about communities across the country, how we think about societies, and so on. There's this local-global thing going on at the same time that's fascinating.

Frankly, it was unexpected. We thought the new media was going to make where you physically were less relevant; in fact, it makes it highly relevant.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Pomerleau, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Dr. Gaffield, for your thoughtful presentation. Our research officers inform us that you are an expert on the ways demographic, economic and cultural changes influence institutional and political history. That's wonderful.

My question is of a political nature. It comes from someone who is a sovereigntist. At the close of your presentation, you express the hope that we use all of the positives you describe to increase, or nourish, our common Canadian cultural identity. Earlier in your presentation, you gave the example of the Canadian railroad that contributed to the birth of Canada as a nation. My question will flow from what I am about to say. The major political decisions in Canada, such as building the Canadian railroad, needed to be taken. I completely agree with those decisions. Canadians could not have done otherwise, or they would have remained a small people living in a small part of a very vast land that needed to be settled. Although it may not have been the objective, the decision to build the railroad ultimately had the effect of diminishing Quebec culture and identity. Quebec's minority position grew as Canada was built. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that western Canada is set to be given more elected representatives in Canada's Parliament, given the larger population in western Canada. A pro-Canada decision reduced Quebec's position.

This same can be said about the St. Lawrence Seaway. The construction of the seaway killed Montreal as the economic capital of Canada. Mordecai Richler even wrote a book about this. He wrote the following, and I quote: "Once the St. Lawrence Seaway was in place, diminishing the importance of Montreal, Montreal's slippage was inevitable." This is entirely true. I'm not anti-Canadian, but rather pro-Canadian. All of the decisions that were made were intelligent decisions that Canada needed to make. However, as a result, Quebec's political, economic and cultural powers were diminished.

My question is therefore political in nature. You claim that there is a desperate need for the Canadian identity to be strengthened. Mr. Del Mastro is quite right to say that there is more to being Canadian that hockey games and maple syrup.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: No, he mentioned Tim Hortons.

Mr. Roger Pomerleau: That's even worse.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: They're not familiar with maple syrup.

Mr. Roger Pomerleau: Canada is perfectly right to do what it is doing. It has no choice. If I were to ask you, as a Canadian, what steps should Canada take to guarantee that any efforts made to raise the nation's profile will not diminish Quebec's culture, what would your answer be?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: That's a broad question.

Canadian identity has evolved tremendously since the 19th century. In each different era, that identity was linked to either an agricultural or urban society. Of course, it is reflected in demographic, economic and cultural changes. Canadian history shows that a country remains viable provided it changes with the times.

The key question, for all jurisdictions at all levels, is knowing how to adjust to local, regional and global realities. Identity comes into play at every level. I am a resident of the city of Ottawa. Identity is a complex issue.

In the 19th century, the use of one language in schools was promoted, for example, by France and the United States, as a means of strengthening society. Today, people claim that a society's strength lies in its diversity and that this diversity must be encouraged. We are in the process of redefining approaches and rejecting a cookie-cutter approach for communities, an approach that was associated with the 19th and 20th centuries. We are seeking to establish cohesive communities based on diversity, not uniformity. How do we build cohesive communities that benefit from diversity at every level? That is a question for Canada, the United States, France and other world countries. This is the dynamic that is currently at play. The goal for the 21st century is to build diverse, rather than homogeneous, societies. How do we meet this interesting challenge?

● (1225)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Uppal, please.

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentations. It's obviously a very fascinating topic, and there are so many different angles to it.

You mentioned Canadian diversity and Canadian identity, and that because of the low cost of new media, different cultural communities across Canada have been able to connect with each other as well as bring content from their home countries into Canada and experience that as well, going beyond just traditional TV or radio and newsprint. That has been able to bring Canadians together.

It's interesting that Canadian-born children with ethnic backgrounds have been able to learn more about their cultures because of new media. You can actually get various translated religious scripts now on your BlackBerry or your iPhone; previously you'd probably have had to go somewhere and find these scripts and try to get someone to translate them for you. New media have been able to affect new Canadians in different ways.

I know Mr. Del Mastro was saying that we're more than just hockey, but hockey's still a very strong part of Canadian culture, to the point that now, I think on Bell, you can actually get NHL with Punjabi and Mandarin commentary, so that's a strong part of Canadian culture with different languages.

How do you see new media shaping Canadian identity itself? Also, Canadian governments have always paid into multiculturalism. Do you see that changing now, with the way new media are working together with the different cultural communities we have?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: That's a fascinating question.

It's really pretty recent, I think, dating from the 1960s. Until the 1960s, what they call modernization theory was the driving force of understandings of change. The idea was that slowly but surely, everyone around the world was going to increasingly look similar and act similarly.

In other words, English was going to take over, everyone would have the golden arches, and we'd all have roughly the same number of children. It was the best way to organize society, and slowly but surely it would spread all over the world. That was how you were really going to progress: by adopting these best practices and having everyone do them. It was the ideal.

Very quickly we've moved into this new paradigm, which says that if you go down that path, it would be the path to destruction, because it would make you extremely vulnerable if it turned out that although you thought this was the best thing, it didn't work out that way.

For example, there's a lot of concern now about endangered languages. The issue is that those languages enrich our understandings of the world. They have ways of imagining and articulating perceptions of the world that really enrich us. We don't want to envision a world in which there's a single language, a single this, a single that, because it's going to make us too fragile and therefore unable to deal with changes when they come. We need to have that kind of diversity. As in my example, the reason we want genetic diversity is the same reason we want economic diversity: we don't want to put all our eggs in one basket.

What's happening now in terms of identity is we've moved from the notion, for example, that we should have the single to the notion of the multiple. In terms of your hockey example, why not enjoy hockey in multiple languages? Isn't that an enrichment of our understanding of this classically Canadian pastime? It's a big enrichment of it. It makes it better. It makes it stronger, and so on.

It's a very different way of looking at it. To look at diversity as a strength and to see it as a protection that will equip us to deal with change in the future is a very different way to look at it.

Obviously there are limits to that idea. We don't want to get everything so fragmented that we can't work together as a society, so we're back to that balance between what I like to call vertical and horizontal connecting. We need that balance. We need the balance in terms of the commonness that was being alluded to there, in terms of what makes this society tick, but at the same time the diversity that enriches it and is dynamic can continue.

It seems to me that the potential, the opportunity, with new media is finding out how to use it to make Canada stronger and stronger as we move onto that global stage of the 21st century.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We started about ten minutes late, so I'm going to do one more round. It'll be Liberal question, Conservative question, New Democratic question.

Mr. Dhaliwal, would you take the first question?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll carry on with the discussion that Mr. Uppal initiated.

You said that the future is ours, and there's no doubt about it. Canada has been a leader, and particularly so now, as the multicultural and diverse nation that we are here. In Canada, this century belongs to us.

How can the government play a role with the private sector to make sure that we are the leaders and that when it comes to digital media, new technologies, and knowledge, we have the capabilities to compete with giant nations like China and India?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: In your question I think you put your finger on the answer. You alluded to the multiple players in this: the communities, the businesses, the various jurisdictions, and so on. In this new recognition of complexity, what we see is unlike the situation in the 19th century and 20th century—namely, that no one level of government in any position can alone fix problems or make a big difference. It's got to be done in collaboration and in some kind of connection with all other key aspects. The challenge now for any of us, in any of our organizations, is to act in ways that enhance and enable and fit with the actions of others.

For example, on our research council we now see ourselves as intimately linked to the universities across Canada, the private sector partners of those universities, and so on. We are truly in a multi-stakeholder world, and we're very conscious that whatever we do has to be done in a way that makes sense in terms of those other pieces of the puzzle. That's a new role. At some level it seemed to me that historically, in the case of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, we had the little idea in the beginning that we could develop programs and support them more or less within ourselves. Now we find increasingly that our programs and how we think about them must be done in the context of other institutions, communities, and so on. That's the challenge.

It seems to me that the federal role is now in a much more diverse and complex context, and it's in that context that the opportunity for me to be here and for these kinds of exchanges to take place are really important.

● (1235)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: The other very interesting point you mentioned was about the languages that are endangered now. Besides our two official languages in Canada, French and English, there are more than 6,500 languages, including sign language, across our great nation. Many of them, including the aboriginal languages, are endangered at this time.

Can you tell me how society can play a role in facing the challenges to protect those languages?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: One of the key differences, which links back to an earlier question, was that when we thought about endangered languages some years ago, to some extent the idea was that saving them would be a nice thing to do. It would be a generous thing to do. Now we're thinking about this much more from the perspective that we need to save them; we need to think that idea through, in the sense of enriching ourselves and enriching the pool of talent.

We've been supporting research projects of scholars such as Karen Rice and others, who are trying to document and capture, at some level, some of the richness of these endangered languages so that the richness can continue to inform us all and enrich our lives.

It's a very interesting change from the idea that we should worry about them for moral reasons. Now that's been layered onto the idea that we should take advantage of them, because that's how, in fact, we're going to continue to thrive in the 21st century; it's going to reinforce our chances in going forward. It's a very interesting shift, and our researchers are attempting to capture that richness as a way of arming us and enlarging the pool of perspectives that we have going forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Grewal, please.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I have two short questions for you.

The first one is about the rise of digital media, the use of the Internet to share your music, photos, and videos. What is the impact of all of that on our policy-makers?

Second, how are policy-makers in other countries dealing with the rise of digital media? Could you please tell us?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: I'll start with the second one first. It's obviously, as you know, a hot international debate around the world.

One of the interesting dynamics, though, and I do want to emphasize this a bit, is what's called the open access movement. This has become very important, and it changes a whole lot of the dynamics. Just thinking about it in the economic sense, for example, we have found that making research open access as much as possible can really help the creators of that research. Why? Because it gets them known.

It's interesting that in our fields, it used to be the case that in order for a researcher to really advance their career, they would publish in scholarly journals and monographs and so on; but now, if they are not also very active in tweeting and using podcasts, their reputations and the value of their work will not get known, and in fact their careers will be hurt. So that's a fascinating change in terms of how the new media is really switching things around.

We see this on the music side. For example, artists now know that if their music does not get out and get heard, no one is going to go to their concerts to see them. The role of the concert, the physical concert, for example, has become much more important now in terms of revenue generation, and so on, and the digital side is used to promote that.

So it's a very interesting dynamic in which the policy assumptions, it seems to me, of the past don't play in the same ways. At SSHRC, we're trying to deal with that, because in the past we had, for example, funded scholars to put their research findings in printed ways, and now we have to find new policies to really enable open access and the new media in terms of the dissemination and exchange of information.

My sense is that on the music side and so on, there's no doubt that those industries—what we call the creative industries—are growing rapidly, and it's partly because there are just so many more people easily able to contribute. You know, Marshall McLuhan said in the 1960s, when photocopiers came out, that now everyone would be an author. Well, if photocopiers could make everyone an author, obviously the new technologies are enabling that, but the key point, it seems to me, is that people *want* to be authors.

That's such an interesting phenomenon. People don't just want to consume, they want to be authors. They don't just want to watch something, they want to engage in it.

That's what the new technologies are really enabling. They're enabling a kind of active side. We're trying to embrace this in terms of schools. We're trying to embrace this in terms of building communities, advancing the economy, and so on.

It's a very different notion of consumers, of products, of services. It is a very different notion. It turns out that people want to create. It's not just a very tiny, select group.

So I think it is changing dramatically now and redefining what we mean by artists, what we mean by consumers, what we mean by spectators, and so on.

● (1240)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Chair, do I have some more time left?

The Chair: For a very short question and a very short answer.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Del Mastro.

The Chair: Okay, but very short, as in one minute.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: No problem.

You made an interesting point. You just said a minute ago that new technology is actually enabling everyone to contribute. It's kind of opening up opportunities for people to contribute. To go back to something that I said earlier as well, I think anybody can be a broadcaster. Anybody can be a recording artist.

From that perspective, to me, the investments we're making in digital technology would therefore, certainly on the musical side, seem to be more important than investments we could make into, say, the recording side. If people can actually access digital opportunities, that would seem to me to present a bigger opportunity than to access a former conventional form.

Would you agree with that?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: I think it's always a question of balance, but there's no doubt that the creator side is a little unanticipated. When the digital age got going, I don't think it was expected that people would really change from sitting on the couch to wanting to get in there and be part of the stage. I think we're trying to deal with that.

There's no doubt about it: a driving force of the digital era is the extent to which individuals want to be active creators of their own lives. Now, obviously, it seems to me, a positive side of that, I think, is that we're now, in the 21st century, going to tap the true potential of human beings.

● (1245)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: The issue of saving language is, I think, a great example. We would previously have thought that to save a language you would need a national policy, a national commitment, educators, and so on. We have many aboriginal languages disappearing, and unless we do this from the top down, these will disappear. It would seem to me, from my experience, that what's happening is that things are being saved from the bottom up.

For example, every night...I'm not telling what I do in the evening, but I go home and go on YouTube. I type in “Junior Walker guitar licks”, and someone teaches me how to play Junior Walker guitar licks. I type in “B.B. King”, and someone teaches me how to play B. B. King.

These are millions of people who are offering their skills. Some of them are terrible, but the great thing about YouTube is you can go to the next one. People are offering language skills. People are sharing skills that nobody thought had a value before, because nobody could get them.

So it comes back to the question my colleague asked earlier, about access. The democratic function and the ability of citizens to participate are going to be dictated by their ability to have access so they can take control of their stories and obscure languages that are dying out.

To add some context, four years ago I worked for a first nation that was 300 kilometres north of Ottawa. They had one telephone for the entire community. It was pretty hard to work for that community when there was only one telephone. Now they have Facebook pages.

That's not to say, though, they are entering the digital realm. As you say, the gap is going to begin to dramatically shift as the potential starts to move toward people who have full access and away from people who at best can get a Facebook page and nothing else.

I guess it goes back to an issue of policy. We can allow all kinds of creative development, but we need a vision for digital development as a nation. That includes broadband policy and access, and having government support this creative agenda. I'm still not sure if we as legislators have a clue about how to go about that.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: On the metaphor of bottom-up, top-down, and the new paradigm, the 19th and 20th century paradigm by and large was top-down. You've put your finger on the new dynamic, in which it's both. Often the strength of the bottom-up is significant. It relates to what we were talking about earlier, about the customer-driven marketplace and so on. There are many aspects, such as citizen engagement, and it goes on and on. I think that's a really important metaphor to keep in mind.

The second important thing you said is that people are contributing. They're helping you do licks on a guitar just because they want to. It's interesting that when the Internet started, the idea was that if you didn't have a business model to make money, people would not do this. It turns out that people will volunteer and create encyclopedias just for the pleasure and satisfaction of trying to contribute. So the whole motivational aspect is interesting.

Going back to my idea of tapping human potential, it turns out that we want to contribute. If you have a need, I'm willing to help; you don't necessarily have to pay me. I think that's an interesting new dynamic of the new era.

The third point is that triangle of access, content, and digital literacy. Keeping that balance and integrated package together must be front and centre.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Being the chair, I have the last chance, but I don't really have a question. I just think that what we have to do—maybe you could answer this—is look at new media as an asset, not a liability. What you have said here today is to open it up. The asset is that it can go on and on; it's new. I think as our committee goes forward, we should look at the whole new media study in terms of how it can be an asset to us, not how it can be a liability.

Would that be right?

● (1250)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: I think that's exactly the theme. And because your committee is so concerned with issues of digital content and digital literacy, in terms of that integrated triangle that is going to move us ahead, this committee is in an ideal position to help us as Canadians, and to help the world, frankly. I do think that Canada is ideally placed to make a contribution in terms of how we build a 21st century that embraces complexity, diversity, and creativity, and that recognizes the horizontal and vertical connections, the bottom-up, top-down. Canada is ideally positioned to really contribute at a global level.

So I wish you all well. I want to say, for my colleagues and me, it has been a thrill for us to be here and chat with you. If at any point we can help in any way, if our researchers can help in any way, we're there 150%.

The Chair: Thank you very much. It was a great presentation.

The meeting is adjourned.

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