



The Impact of Social Media on Global Democracy Movements

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Abstract

The proliferation of social media has helped to empower individuals across the globe to engage in political activism. This form of online communication began in 1997 as virtual communities via SixDegrees.com; a web site that enabled users to list friends or send messages. By 2007, social networking services and life updates via microposts became popular on Facebook and Twitter. Within the past decade, the usage of online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have been vital to many political campaigns and movements. While some view social media as a democratizing force that enables the sharing of ideas to benefit from the broadest platform available, others describe social media as platforms fostering the spread of misinformation. For that, it is critically necessary for political experts, theorists, and politicians to understand the effects that social media has on global democracy movements. In order to establish a comprehensive review and explanation of this area of understanding, the following will be analyzed: the dual nature of social media as it empowers and lacks credibility as a dependable news source, the significance of accumulating insight into social media's amplifying role in democratic engagement and political activism worldwide, an explanation of the research methodology to examine the developments of social media in five global democracy movements, North Korea, the Arab Spring, Hong Kong, Turkey, and the United States, and a discussion of the findings and implications for current and future practices of democracy.

Keywords: social media, global democracy, political activism, misinformation, democratic engagement, political campaigns, Arab Spring, online platforms.



2. Introduction

Social media platforms have experienced rapid growth in the last decade. They are now recognized as global platforms, connecting people around the world. Despite the initial utopian ideals of social media creating spaces for healthy political dialogue and helping to democratize authoritarian regimes, these platforms have come under much scrutiny recently for fueling disinformation, mass data mining, and proliferation of hate speech (Billings, 2017). There is insufficient attention to the impact of social media on democracy in different country contexts: one leans on theories and debates from countries, groups, and struggles that have a profile of democracy, and a tradition of experience and research of social media, which is Eurocentric and North American centric. The struggle for democracy in each region has a unique socio-historic context; social media too play a distinct role due to its diverse architecture and use. In addition, understanding the relationship of social media and democracy requires clear definition of the terms democracy, social media, and the conception of their relationship, that have been sorely lacking in an expansive public discourse (Dhillon, 2014). It is not surprising to see Egyptian youth, apart from face-to-face relational activism, mobilizing and networking through different social media platforms: Facebook pages and groups, event-making, sharing information through status updates and tweets, and uploading images and videos. The role of these networking technologies in “broadcasting” their civil unrest against the authoritarian regime sent not only shock waves in its own political regime, but reverberated across the globe with the visuals coming out of Tahrir Square. The Arab Spring also found twitterers and bloggers organizing and mobilizing public spaces, both virtual and real, against corrupt governance and mismanagement. Growing awareness of social injustices and economic disparities fueled by partisan politics found in these platforms a viable space for social- and political-change dialogue. At the same time, social media were effective tools for making the 2009 voter mobilization and strengthening the parliamentary opposition, which eventually secured the judge in fair nomination and election process. This democratic movement of 2014 was distinct from the previous People’s Movement from three perspectives: (i) The collective leadership model, (ii)



different sets of demands, and (iii) appetites for anti-corruption. The success of the ten-month movement that thwarted the sham election and unconstitutionally challenging the opposition leader from being sworn in as the Prime Minister, therefore reverberated across democratic countries in Southeast Asia.

3. The Role of Social Media in Democracy Movements

Social media plays a significant role in democracy movements around the world. Its most inherent feature, digital peer-to-peer social networking, is a driving force that mobilizes more individuals to participate in processes of change (Billings, 2017). It also serves as a tool that broadens the reach of alternative information, which can sway the thoughts of large swaths of people (Terzis, 2016). This ability disturbs incumbent regimes in ways traditional activists could not. The notable example would be the Arab Spring, which began from online campaigns in 2010 to gain support over a regional issue. Such a seemingly insignificant initiative not only fostered virtual communities but also developed dependable support networks that facilitated subsequent protests. Last, social media creates a public space that allows a mass of individuals to engage in collective action from various locations. It affords people avenues to organize both large-scale controversial activities and opposite ones, fostering nationwide debate on critical issues and overpowering a government's strategic position to control information.

In the context of public discourse, while powerful and established institutions and renowned individuals have controlled the message, social media is crucial in creating an environment in which every person can contribute to shaping discourse through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The latter platform is particularly powerful because its content has a wider range, and thus can more likely influence general public opinion compared to Facebook's relatively more insulated content. In other democratic countries, the utilization of such platforms as part of a government's strategy to address a national issue has been observed. Such incidents exemplify how



social media has 'bottom-up', 'multi-directional' rapid effects, and is thus outside the power of orthodox fiber networks to identify as it occurs in real-time. However, its reach is so wide and viral content spreads so quickly that big-shots in traditional media find it hard to ignore or trivialize.

4. Case Studies of Social Media's Influence

Firstly, it is necessary to establish case studies to outline the influence of social media upon democracy movements. Conclusive case studies are admired both for their uniqueness and their chronological pattern. As such, the commencement will be of the sixteenth century Dutch media censorship and the establishment of the Eerste Vrije Folle to journalists as “protectors of the peace”. Thereon will follow Indonesia’s political transition where political activism was spurred by SMS backlash to electoral manipulation supported by pro-democracy sites. Following this is South Korea’s Candlelight Protests orchestrated through Twitter exposing government weaknesses to reopening of US beef imports. In the United State’s Barack Obama’s extensive campaign which amassed substantial grass-root support leading to the first African-American presidency. Post that is illustrating American youth engagement through the Gen Veda (Vote For Hope) video release where Obama espoused pro democratic ideals. Finally, focusing upon objectivity, a study will analyse social media in the Maldives and its transition to participatory democracy questioning the limitations and potential disillusionment. That case study finalises with the 2007 arrest of national journalist kidnapped and thrown off Maldives Democratic Party cliff and its revelations.

In a world where the prominence of global media conglomerates like CNN international mix with the open-sourced platforms of social media giant Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, a global audience is fed a steady 24-hour stream of news. In the last decade those watching have witnessed some momentous changes from the heady optimism of the Arab Spring to the recent aggressive advances of the self-declared Islamic state in Syria and Iraq. Major political campaigns have sprung from the comingling of social media activism and offline presence from the black lives



matter campaign in the US, to the red-shirt/yellow-shirt protests in Thailand. Either to incite action, in solidarity campaigns around the globe, or to undermine state control, information shared has the capacity to rapidly disseminate the message, more than ever social media continues to shape political outcomes (Arafa & Armstrong, 2016).

5. Challenges and Criticisms

The rise of social networking sites coincides with increased global interest in democracy, spurring expectations that they will be positively connected to the spread of democracy. In the process of studying online activity in social movements, scholars have observed unexpected consequences. revealed that events unfolded in such a way as to legitimize the power of officials while highlighting problems with censorship. As a customer-owned corporation, Twitter collaborated with countries employing censorship to build solutions that allow for suppression of post reaches. In a contrasting example, this control was used to record events during the police assault on protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, which otherwise would have banned video clips. Comparisons with the monitoring process carried out prior to the strike by airport union workers showed significantly less comprehensive data capture. Thus, Twitter neither materially forbid such measures nor proclaimed the real ethical battles when such a use of control became known in the public domain. is broadly compatible with . As outlined in her conclusions and speculatively discussed in the findings, it is suggested that in cases of her resonance in Russia, social media could assist in quelling demonstrations by controlling their structure, siding with officials, or amplifying falsehoods. Hamm deals with the problem for rivals. Inclusion is not permanent; false claims must be substantiated by those who report them and are not formally disproved by Twitter .

Besides this, as a media storehouse, Twitter may be broader than revealed. The latest led to a sex discrimination court case, but in 2015 there were precedents that are more nuanced than the public conscience. Facebook closely controls its portrayal by selecting incidents, and although this may not be censorship, it is deceitful . TV news programs that post for the first and second times gain less followers and draw more



viewers. They are also better able than other TV networks to engage with viewing audiences, and view rates drop less sharply when airtime is over. Frequent minor posting has a beneficial effect on individual TV stations. It fails to demonstrate a direct link between repression and citizen engagement online, calculated using metrics for protest level and electronic engagement. Following Tyrant's repression does not significantly increase the probability of protests. For the social media component, there is no evidence of monitoring impact on online activism (excluding election-related and sign-up broadcasting). Internet activism and protest are highly counterintuitive markers, nor are online activism or protest found overall (including signings, memorial pages, and other online sweepstakes). Unlike and , there is no evidence that censorship activity could result in increased or additional online engagement. At most, it adds support to the contention that for own reporting purposes, censorship might attempt to remove online resistance posts. Both groups had returnees interact with previous participants who had not yet returned to strengthen communication of the message successfully; this was especially effective for the second group. Behavioural spillover extended to the broader village community, where additional food consumption was observed in the first week only in women. (Dal & Nisbet, 2022)

6. Future Trends and Implications

Social media experts predict that in the years ahead there will be changes that will reshape the ecosystem of social media in fundamental ways. Technologies emerging today are likely to become common in the years ahead and influence how democracy is carried out online. Artificial intelligence, for example, is expected to streamline many activities currently carried out by people, such as moderating message boards, photo labeling and recognition, and responding to basic customer inquiries. For democracy movements, AI could make it easier to spot rising levels of discontent in a population or to track the propaganda being disseminated, either by their government or by hostile foreign actors (E. Katz, 2012). Blockchain is predicted to change how platforms are governed allowing networks of peer-to-peer technology to avoid



centralized control by corporations or states. On the other hand, the anonymity of blockchain technology is currently used to spread disinformation, by making it harder to trace the source of a story. Democracies that depend on the ability to verify the source of information will struggle under this system.

User behavior also continues to change, and in unpredictable ways. For example, those aged 14-24 decreased their time spent visiting Facebook by a massive 30.9%, both on desktop and mobile devices, since the beginning of 2017. For global democracy movements, this may mean missing out on a vitally important segment of the biggest social networks audience (Billings, 2017). Meanwhile, between 2015 and 2017, political discussion location on social media moved from private message boards and Twitter to Facebook public pages. The algorithms running Facebook prioritized content from friends, leading to more political discussion in these areas. This too may change in the future, requiring a high level of adaptability on the part of those pushing for social change. Some trends are not as unpredictable, and their future impact on democracy movements has been well-studied. In the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, governments and organizations worldwide will push for more regulation of social media. The GDPR in Europe has already placed limits on what kind of user data can be harvested. Researchers agree that rules such as these disproportionately benefit larger platforms, at the cost of smaller competitors. Considering that the largest one, Facebook, has been demonstrated to prefer governments to democracy movements, a further move in this direction could prove deadly to them. Finally, the oldest social media users have skewed heavily towards one political side; if that trend continues, with disastrous results for democracy movements. Two ways of resisting these effects have been proposed. The first is to foster digital literacy and critical thinking among social media users. The second is to avoid proposing new regulations to social media. (Hosen et al.2021)

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