

Social media as a tool for protest



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The revolution in social media has made it easier for likeminded people to gather and voice their opinion on a particular subject of common interest, the revolution has accelerated the rate at which relationships develop, information is communicated and influence is transmitted.

Social media is like community places in past: a place where aggravated people can get together to discuss and raise protests. Facebook has played a large role in this revolution since it has taught users a new way to create groups, spread information all over the globe and voice their opinion unanimously.

Social media has had a profound effect on society, commoners now has a chance of having their voice heard, there is a sense of hope, as every issue has the ability to be widespread, empowering citizens of all nations with the power of being heard. A recent example is the rape crime currently committed in India, the news and protests have spread throughout the globe from India to the United States and people are signing petitions on Facebook condemning this act and asking for a death penalty for the abusers. In this case governments face increasing pressure because of the power of the crowd, and due to the Arab spring, the power of the crowd should not be underestimated.

In recent proceedings like the Tunisian uprising, the Egyptian protests and, the most common, the student protests, social media has acted as tool to get people altogether and carry out the protests and uprising. It is important to note that social media in its entirety should not be blamed for the uprising as it is merely a tool to disseminate information quickly and on a broader

level. There are many other elements to consider when carrying out a protest for revolutionary change such as funding, organisation and proper leadership.

The key to creating a proper protest movement is to motivate and convince people about a certain cause, and to inspire them to leave the comfort of their own homes and face the chaos and gravity of the streets, to be prepared to face the police and other irregularities of the open street. Social Media's role in this revolutionary period is allowing the revolutionists to broadcast information at a cheaper cost, participants do not have to attend regular meetings, workshops or rallies. So in order to make a social media led revolution into reality it is necessary for it to be translated into street action.

But in some countries the government directly controls the media profoundly; social media are one of the reliable sources of news for citizens. They are somehow the voice of the natives. Bloggers take over the position of journalists and correspondents to bring the news that would otherwise be suppressed and masked by the government. Hence this shows that social media is not directly responsible for revolution, in Egypt when the government blocked internet access, the revolutionaries distributed information through handing out pamphlets with their tactics and they used fax and telephone lines for communication, something which was done in Iran in 2009.

In fact social media are not accountable for the protests; they may be a tool to organize them. The channel for the Tunisian uprising was the self-

immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi. This event set off people to protest against the said Tunisian government. The social media coverage of this event made the protests spread and helped to organize protests on a broad scale eventually.

Only 21% of the Egyptian population use internet and only 33.4% of the Tunisians. (Internet World Stats, 2012) these figures are unlikely to launch an entire national movement, but are enough to get it initiated. Though the government shut down all that from the internet but the protests still kept on growing and made up to The March of many Millions.

Social media is not only used for physical protests, but are being used for digital protests. One can join even a Face book group to express his support, opinion and comment if he cannot make it to the physical protest. In this regard Twitter is also used, when there is a live protest happening.

The use of said social media will definitely expand in future years and perhaps 2013 will be the year of the " social protests".

Influence and power of media & global contestation

Social media alone does not work for revolutions alone; they are the tools that allow revolutionary groups to groom well. It lowers the overall cost of participation, recruitment, training and organization. And inherent weaknesses, strengths along with their effectiveness depends how influentially leaders use them, how it is easily accessible to the general category of people.

The Iranian "green revolution" in 2009 was upraised mostly by the western media through YouTube and twitter that follows later Moldova's revolution 2009 that is "twitter revolution". Revolution always required an organization, mass appeal and funding. Sometimes they appear vulnerable to the government's counter protest strategies. To motivate individuals up to that required standard that is required, joining the chaos of the streets, mention their protest, and record their point of views instead of sitting at their houses. Social media presently has become important tool for social networking and most importantly the content sharing among the community. The content is generated from the websites that are up to date and remains largely untapped. Social media demonstrate how social media content can be used to predict real-world outcomes in this age of fast communication. Particular, we can use the chatter from public sharing sites like Twitter to forecast the upcoming situations. The tweets extracted from Twitter may be further utilized to improve the forecasting power of social media. The information spread like fire in the forest and the community is driven by the social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL PROTEST:

The participation of social media in political protests could be anticipated since the birth of social media. It plays a vital role in awareness and revolutionary impacts around this global village. But we can say a boost influence was made after the introduction of Facebook In 2003, Youtube In 2005 And Twitter In 2006 and such type of other social networking sites.

An Article posted in (TheAge, 2012) is an example of a social networking site used in a political protest in which it is written that " Facebook was used to rally the protesters who gathered in Sydney's CBD to demonstrate against an anti-Islam film but the rally was hijacked by " extremists", says Muslim community".

In the same article Ms Abdel-Fattah said Facebook updates from friends at the protest depicted a demonstration that had started peacefully until a minority of extremists hijacked it.

However one of the famous protest made in 2011 in Egypt covered quite a role of social media, (taken from an article by Anne Alexander on 9th February 2011 in BBC NEWS) The events of 28 January are particularly important, because they contain crucial clues to understanding the broader relationship between the media - both " new" and " old" - and the mass movement for change which has developed in Egypt over the past few weeks. The Social media is creating very difficult for the some authoritarian leaders to maintain an authoritarian rule. Media is making it difficult even for tough autocracies such as Iran and Myanmar.

Firstly, the fact that an internet and mobile phone blockade failed shows clearly that this movement is not based on the web. In fact, the movement which erupted on 25 January has brought together many groups who have taken to the streets over the past 10 years.

They are varied socially and politically, ranging from workers to bloggers and democracy campaigners, to senior judges, to members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Coptic Christians.

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This is the first time they have all demonstrated together, and the first time they have been joined by millions of their fellow citizens. But it is important to understand that this movement builds on a legacy of protest by many different activist networks, most of which are not primarily organized online.

Secondly, it is clear that the protesters use a range of different media to communicate with each other and to get their message across.

I was in Tahrir Square on Sunday: everywhere you look there are mobile phones, hand-written placards, messages picked out in stones and plastic tea cups, graffiti, newspapers and leaflets, not to mention al-Jazeera's TV cameras which broadcast hours of live footage from the square every day. When one channel of communication is blocked, people try another.

Every mass movement needs spaces where political alternatives can be debated and organization can take place.

In the 1940s, the last time that Egypt saw mass protests on a similar scale, radical bookshops, underground newspapers and illegal trade union meetings played this role.

For the current generation some of these spaces have been online.

I asked Ahmed, a socialist activist in Tahrir Square, what role he thought the internet was playing in mobilizing protest.

" Online organizing is very important because activists have been able to discuss and take decisions without having to organize a meeting which could be broken up by the police," he said.

We can also witness social media as warfare in the Gaza Battle, as NBC News brings in our knowledge that Israeli and Hamas military forces tired to fight the conflicts in GAZA by using social media. " But the Israeli Defense Forces' broadcasting of the details of its attacks against Gaza via Twitter, YouTube, and its own blog (IDFblog. com) is more organized and pointed-and its viral qualities have made it perfect fodder for protesters. Soon after the IDF's first tweet of an attack last Wednesday, protesters across the globe took to the streets to rally against the bloodshed and show their support for Gaza-and for Israel as well" posted by Cara Maresca (MSNBC, 2012)

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ACTIVISM:

Activism can be defined as the vigorous or revolutionary actions, protests, demonstrations etc taken in order to implement or achieve goals. However social media is one of the main orbit around which activism revolves.

Its main influence could be seen majorly in youth. Many NGOs and other organizations lay down platforms for activists.

An example of rising activism through social media can be given from the article " Global activist network involving Asia: global continuation an evolution in Japan" written by Takuro Higuchi (inter-Asia cultural studies, volume 13, number 3, 14th June 2012)

" Since Seattle 1999, plenty of summit protests around WTO, G8/20, IMF, WB, COP, and so on happened in each of the different summit sites in the last decade. Such incidents were amazingly accepted because of their mass actions and widespread networks of activists sustaining a series of mass actions. As some researchers argue, those of generating networks are based

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on horizontality and autonomy, and they have already prefigured a powerful model for (re)organizing society. However, on the other hand, some researchers also argue the major shortcomings. In theory, the 'Global Activist Network' has been constructed since Seattle, although in practice there has still been a serious spatial gap between the Western part of the world and the other side of the world. Actually, the global activist network has excluded Asia. However, in 2008, the G8 summit was held in Japan. This paper, thus, aims to show that the global activist network since Seattle, which was limited to Europe and North America, has expanded to involve Asia through the 2008 G8 summit in Japan. The 2000 G8 in Japan was right after the Seattle in 1999, yet, due to its single-issue and national character of the movements, globally expanding networks didn't reach Japan. However, movements around the 2003 anti-Iraq war brought in the autonomous character of the alter-globalization movement and referred to the legacy of autonomous activism. During the 2008 G8, some autonomous activists in Japan took over the diversity of tactics and networks of activists inherited since PGA, DAN and 'Dissent!'"

Another great definition of social network relating activism can be read under the heading of GLOBAL ACTIVISM NETWORK:

" When scholars and activists conceptualize social movements, increasingly, they emphasize the role of networks in activist organizations and coalitions. There is accumulating evidence that activist issue campaigns are strengthened and broadened by their network-based organizational strategies. These networks are often transnational or global in their reach thanks, in large part, to the enabling qualities of the Internet. The following

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links present papers and websites that provide resources for better understanding the strategies, strengths and limitations of activist networks.

(Govcom, 2012) features work by Richard Rogers and his colleagues at the University of Amsterdam. Using social network analysis methods, these researchers explore innovative techniques for measuring networks and tracing their dynamics over time. They are able to create remarkable sociograms or maps of activist networks. Richard Rogers has also developed typologies for hyperlinks and networks.

Bennet (1998)

Globalization has changed societies and the ways in which people think about and communicate politics. This paper explores properties of global activist communication and examines their implications for political organization and change" according to (Global Activists Network, 2011)

However social media turned out to be very helpful for the disable activists as well. Written by Patric Butler " while there are fears that traditional methods of disability activism are on the wane, a new campaigning spirit is been forged using the social media revolution" he also wrote " Galvanized by the government's draconian welfare reform agenda, the new activism arguably is helping to renew a disability movement thought by some to have lost its way in recent years.

The staggering Twitter-driven success of the " We Are Spartacus" campaign in January announced the emergence of this new wave. This carefully planned viral campaign steered by a tiny band of activists almost single-

handedly put the previously arcane issue of cuts in disability on the public agenda"

Awareness of social media and activism is also given to the young generation, as they are the upcoming leaders of tomorrow, events and programs are organized for their knowledge an example of such act is an event organized in Glasgow by the name " KIDS, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ACTIVISM" on September 24th 2012.

However, a book GLOBAL ACTIVISM, GLOBAL MEDIA written by Wilma de Jong, Martin Shaw, Neil Stammers ties up much of the activism related with social media.

INTERNET EMPOWERMENT:

Though social media is actually web based media and it refers to accessible online technologies where people share, publish, comment, and communicate etc across the global village.

Starting from the local communities, we see a great internet empowerment around " Social media has the capacity to alter traditional power dynamics. Consumers can influence the buying decisions of others by sharing their experiences of purchasing products or services online. Major industries find themselves disrupted by file sharing and citizen journalism, while governments have been challenged by citizens mobilized with the help of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The Young Foundation wanted to test whether social media could empower local, geographical communities. So we set to work with several community groups in Huddersfield, King's Lynn and north Kensington.

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Across these areas we supported residents who wanted to use social media to develop relationships between neighbors, increase awareness of local news and events, and ultimately encourage more people to get involved in community action" says Mandeep Hothi in a community action blog.

Walking towards the professional approach the " Blow Fish Agency" tells us much about the social internet media empowerment

Both social media marketing and advanced web communication are important approaches to business that are rapidly expanding. One significant trend, appearing with greater frequency, is the necessity for not only brand value, but extreme brand transparency. It is clear that various diverse companies are investing more in social media and web optimization and less in print media and the like. Consumers, in the last decade, have begun spending increasing time on the Internet and less time reading magazines and listening to public radio. The old trends in advertising are quickly becoming obsolete and in order to stay abreast and maintain market share, businesses are taking great measures to keep up with consumers and are gravitating towards web-based marketing. Although the mastery of social media tools does not, by any means, guarantee market domination or any concrete increase in profits, it does allow businesses to stay competitive in an ever-changing marketplace. Blowfish is well aware of the weight that web communication carries with it and strives, on a daily basis, to optimize that communication of its clients.

The internet empowerment and its anticipations can be understood from the book " Network Empowerment" edited by Oliver B Popov. This book is based

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on workshops on network technologies, internet services, control, security, access efficiency etc.

However, events for future internet or social media empowerment awareness are carried out by variety of organizations around the globe. One of the active organizations in Glasgow is a good example for arranging such events. Making Waves - Social Media, Empowerment and Wellbeing is an example of an event organized in Glasgow.

Can social media approaches help empower communities to be more engaged in shaping their own health and wellbeing?

Can they contribute to the creation of richer forms of dialogue between health-related agencies and service users?

What partners, skills and resources can help?

What pitfalls should be avoided?

What kinds of approaches to dialogue, sharing news and telling stories are most productive?

These were the few main motives of this event.

Amsterdam privacy conference 2012 is another example of such event under the heading of " USER EMPOWERMENT IN A SOCIAL MEDIA CULTURE" where ideas were presented and exchanged regarding people under the influence of internet empowerment and the presence common culture of social media around the globe.

Computer revolution has a strong bonding between media and internet; however social media and internet are blended in the same category.

Furthermore increase in empowerments could be anticipated through the past, present and future web technologies advancement.

Defying Social Media

Social Media does have its drawbacks, with the low cost of communication, there is also the cost of low operational security, and messages on Facebook are accessible by almost everyone. Social media is being used as an intelligence collecting tool, and users have become more cautious in giving out more personal information. Therefore the reliability of the information and the information disseminator is questionable, increasing the risks of getting involved into something which is illegal and falling into the wrong hands.

Prior to gaining access to a country, Social Networking sites need to get approval of the governments of the locality, and getting approval usually involves giving the government unlimited access to the data of the users registered in their own country. This in turn increases the risks of the people participating in the revolutionary movement, because if this revolutionary movement fails, then the government has full access to the data of those who were involved and who planned this movement, this information can land them in jail and cause a lot of trouble for them and their families. This is one of the tradeoffs these revolutionaries must think about before deciding to use Social Media as their tool to broadcast their purpose.

Conclusion

In fact, the protests only grew bigger more and more as websites or social media were shut down and the Internet was turned off as in Egypt. If the right situation exists than a historic revolution can occur. Just because an Internet-based group exists does not make it popular or a threat. There are several Face book groups, many YouTube videos and hundreds of Twitter posts about everything, but that can never make them popular only if the concentration of the community is more towards the basic urges and needs. Due to problems like inflation, food shortages, corruption , population must be motivated to mobilize and protest with good zeal and zest. The popularity of the social media, one of many consequence of the Internet, may actually be separated from International media observation. In real time we can now easily watch protest developments and most modern situations.

Western perceptions about the said issue are often easily persuaded by English-speaking, media-savvy. This is now further exaggerated in Authoritarian countries of modern age. Western media is now having the same challenge and have no choice but to turn the social media like Twitter and YouTube on to report on the crisis of the present, thus ultimately increasing the apparent importance of social communal media. In the Middle East, where the Internet diffusion is below 35% if any movement or protest grows large enough to effect the change it will join through the word of mouth, not through the social networking. This is not an insuperable challenge, as shown in china, but even in this case there is

Increasing anxiety about the capability of Internet users to escape controls and spread illegal and forbidden information. Social media can represent

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only one contrivance among many for an resistance group to employ. Protest Movements are hardly ever successful if started from somebody's basement in a virtual arena. Their leaders should behave, just like leaders of any other organization and should organize and gather people and convince them to leave their homes and join a movement which may jeopardize their lives and also the lives of their families Any revolutionary group cannot rely only on its most tech-savvy significant leaders to commence a successful protest or revolution, this is in fact a fraction of the overall policy, and it cannot be the sole strategy to launch a movement

. The real story of social media working for the betterment and developing the nations is one of entity Empowerment. Social media connects deprived nations to the whole world and provides the power to figure the Internet in such a way that it become significant to their peoples' lives, the command to organize in scale, and the influence to speak. Social media can be used positively, to make others hear of social injustices that occur and are un heard of in the convention media channels. Social media has given hope to a number of people and has helped spread the word of many oppressed people, hence when used positively social media can have a revolutionary impact on the users lives. These are the feature that makes social media an implausible tool that may be embraced by everyone with an eye towards significant development.