

DEBATING NEW SOCIAL MEDIA'S POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES TO WORLD'S REVOLUTIONS

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Abstract

This article discusses a debatable notion that new social media alternately acts as the ground of political revolution or creates new social identity and induces cultural change. Social media sites are information and communication technologies (ICTs) that enable production and sharing of digital content in a mediated social setting. Several statistic reports revealed that these online media showed remarkable usage among citizens of countries across the globe. Having those facts on hand, some experts deduces that the higher usage of social media then more likely to seize the opportunity of increasing engagement in various issues, including tools for nearly all of the world's current revolutions. The article also elaborates some counter claims to the notion. As a single click on Facebook group and merely a tweet do not make people politically activated, socially changed and culturally developed. Even though new social media acts as "a great mouthpiece", it seems to be an austere logical linkage to say that new social media serve as a way to trigger the world's current revolutions. All in all, new social media platforms can be utilized by their users with any kind of purposes especially in terms of providing fast and quick informational system.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas gagasan yang cukup hangat diperdebatkan oleh kalangan intelektual dunia bahwa sosial media baru mendasari munculnya revolusi politik, menciptakan identitas sosial jenis baru dan menginduksi perubahan budaya. Situs media sosial adalah teknologi informasi dan komunikasi (TIK) yang memungkinkan konten digital diproduksi dan didistribusikan dalam lingkungan sosial termediasi. Beberapa laporan statistik mengungkapkan bahwa penggunaan media online oleh warga negara dunia menunjukkan angka yang luar biasa. Fakta-fakta inilah yang membuat beberapa ahli menyimpulkan bahwa penggunaan media sosial yang cukup tinggi menaikkan kesempatan keterlibatan warga dunia secara signifikan dalam berbagai isu, termasuk keterlibatan dalam semua revolusi di dunia saat ini. Artikel ini juga menguraikan beberapa klaim bertentangan dengan gagasan tersebut. Bahwa satu klik pada halaman Facebook dan sebuah cuitan pada Twitter tidak membuat orang aktif secara politik, berubah secara sosial dan budaya. Meskipun media sosial baru dapat dikategorikan sebagai "corong besar" penyebaran informasi, hipotesa yang menempatkan media sosial baru sebagai pemicu revolusi sangatlah lemah. Singkatnya, platform media sosial baru dapat dimanfaatkan oleh pengguna mereka dengan segala jenis keperluan terutama dalam hal menyediakan sistem informasi yang cepat dan cepat.

"The media is the most powerful entity on earth.
They have the power to make the innocent guilty.
And to make the guilty innocent, and that's power.
Because they control the minds of the masses."
(Malcolm X, 1925 – 1965)

INTRODUCTION

In his article, *The Mediatization of Society Theory*, Hjarvard (2008) deduces that media simultaneously become an integrated part of society, not to mention the existence of new social media. New social media, a set of identity-centric information and communication technologies (ICTs) that enables production and sharing of digital content in a mediated social setting (Stutzman, 2009) such as Facebook and Twitter, have successfully attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices and transformed them from a situation of information scarcity to one of information abundance. Accordingly, Ronn (2007) in one of his reports notes that new social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, are among the most visited sites on the Internet, just behind the major search engines. Facebook for example, as the site gets more popular, claims that it has more than 500 million active users and 50% of users log on to this site everyday (Facebook, 2011), while Twitter records nearly 100 million tweets written per day with 175 million registered users since its first launch in 2006 (Solis, 2009). Both Facebook and Twitter are equipped with platforms that allow individuals, as cited in Boyd (2007), to "construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". These platforms not only serve

their users as a tool of "sharing of life minutiae" (Green, 2011) but also seize the opportunity of increasing users engagement in various issues. For example, Facebook and Twitter have played an increasing role in American politics as they become what US President Barack Obama campaign in 2008 were most successfully noted for. Accordingly, both also facilitate online community to raise fund for Japanese earthquake and tsunami victims.

However, it appears questionable to simply claim that new social media alternately acts as the ground of political revolution or creates new social identity and induces cultural change (D. Boyd, 2008; Green, 2011; Hoffmann & Kornweitz, 2011). A single click on Facebook group and merely a tweet do not make people politically activated and socially changed. As emphasised by Boyd (2008), it seems to be only a "majestical lustre" that technology's structure instantly influences people's behaviour. Correspondingly, Green (2011) also voices an interesting quandary if new social media actually enhance the democracy itself. It is reasonable because Facebook and Twitter are not a substitute for motivation which considered being the wheel drive of a revolution to be taken place or new community to be formed.

Nonetheless, it is likely understandable from current events that new social media have the power to pursue and persuade as it "holds the premise of increased engagement, a radical change from mass

communication to interaction, from information transmission to dialogue” (Hoffmann & Kornweitz, 2011). In other words, new social media boast potential tool which has negative and positive consequences in achieving political movement, social interaction and cultural advancement

MAIN QUESTIONS AND METHOD

Related to the discussion above, several questions arise related to consequences that new social media generate to the society. Would it be possible for this new type of communication tool to cause political revolutions and break through authoritarian regimes? In what ways it is able to bring democracy and new freedom of expression for citizens? Lastly, how would it provide new forms of identities and communities in today social order?

To answer the questions, this article incorporates case studies and literature reviews. Literature reviews are necessary to accomplish profound understanding of the research topic's framework. They will also serve as sources of substantial data and information. While case studies are performed to obtain facts related to the topic based on best practise.

The article examined literatures such as books, journals and reports as research materials. These materials will mainly focus in new social media, politic, social and cultural dimension in the new phase of technology. In additional, the article is supported with figures, statistic data and surveys from related websites. The article's discussions are arranged in three parts. The first part discuss on new social media and political significances, while second part points out some social implications due to usage of new social media. Lastly, in the third part, the

article address on cultural dimension covers by new social media.

NEW SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Shirky (2011) states that new social media such as Twitter and Facebook have become tools for nearly all of the world's political interest and movement. For instance, Facebook in particular, provides three default platforms for its users to convey their political concerns (Langlois, Elmer, McKelvey, & Devereaux, 2009). First, users can become fan of politician's profile or page. Second, they can create or join a group and last, they can change their political views in their profile. Among the three, becoming a fan or a group is considered to allow users to be more engaged. Once the common interests are created, the Facebook platforms greatly “simplify communicating within and to a network via emails, invitation and reminders”. Likewise, Hanson et al (2010) report that once users participate in the group, they will likely gain a broader “understanding, connection, involvement and interaction” with others who involve in this environment.

There are two highlighted points of how new social media becomes a venue for visibility and place to spread the word. Firstly, new social media facilitates user awareness to be developed as Boyd (2008) states that “it can make visible whether or not political operative are succeeding in getting their message across”. Egypt's revolt might offer the best example for this plea, since political activities in Egypt were enormously coordinated on internet-based. Draws back to January 2011, Egypt's revolution grounded on Egyptian's mounting discontentment over the authoritarian regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Periodic

displayed of mass protests, series of demonstrations, marches and labour strikes took place during the crisis. However, it was not until a Facebook page called We Are All Khaled Saeed, which basically formed in the aftermath of Khaled Mohamed Saeed who's beaten to death by Egyptian security forces, was set up then the world attention's turn to Egypt. Administrated by a Google executive officer, Wael Ghonim, the page immediately spread out news about the crisis to the whole globe. Acted as a prominent integral part of the overall effort, magnetized hundreds of thousands of members worldwide, the page enabled people, not only Egyptian but also non-Egyptian to respond and bring their attention to the crisis.

Secondly, new social media is one of platforms that the government cannot yet successfully prevent or sensor concerning quick dissemination of political information. In Egypt, the only way of government could immensely stop the news spreading was to shut down the whole internet, that is in order to limit communication between protest groups during the protests. Nonetheless, with very limited capacity, Egyptian still able to use mobile technology to access Facebook and Twitter to spread the plan of January 25's protest which by many entitled as the "Day of Revolt" or "Day of Rage" (Giglio, 2011; Nawara, 2011; Siddique, Owen, & Gabbatt, 2011). One Egyptian activist even briefly tweeted during the protests, "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world" (Howard, 2011). Mahmoud El-Nahas's, an Egyptian architect, posted picture confirmed how the new social media quickly spread the plan and bring about more than 1,500 protesters gathered in just one part of the northern

city of el-Mahalla el-Kubra (Ungerleider, 2011). In short, new social media with its interactivity feature had been able to collect, spread and accelerate vital news and information of political interest and movement.

On the other hand, Facebook and Twitter is not a guarantee to a successful political movement. They do become one of the main vessels how news, information and encouragement can be spread of but they are still tools. As stated by Boyd (2008) that "the infrastructure is available for people to spread information, but the motivation is not there to either share or receive it". It cannot replace what really important for people to respond upon certain event, motivation. As Callard (2011) argues that even though new social media acts as "a great mouthpiece", it seems to be an austere logical linkage to say that new social media serve as a way to actually trigger a political movement. In the case of Egypt, social media provided a platform for protestors to organize and spread the word but the actual "groundwork was the important part." Poverty, corruption, inequality before law, lack of freedom of speech and many more were noted as the basic grounds for Egypt revolution. Related to that, Boyd (2008) strongly emphasises that "people will pay attention only to what interest them, regardless of what is technically available".

Likewise, deficiency of new social media tools does not necessarily clarify that people's awareness toward political issue cannot be created. Lea (2011) implies this in his article by saying that "long before Twitter, political movement are manifestly existed in our society". France and Russia is historically best example of how the absence of Facebook and

Twitter did not impede the revolutions both countries experienced. Next, new social media sometimes become ineffective to the political movement itself because the state can also take advantage of this media by utilizing them for its own concern. Shirky (2011) confirms on this arguments by stating that the government "has not lost the power to react". The Iranian election in 2009 and use of new social media during and after the election is a good example of this argument. Having impeded by the authorized government to use old news media, the opposition party, also known as Green Movement, turned to new social media such as Twitter and Facebook in informing, organizing and gathering the support. In fact, the excessive usage of Twitter among the period had made the company delayed its schedule maintenance. In spite of this reality, Twitter also served the Iranian government's interest as well. It turned out that the Iranian secret police had also been used the same tool to "identify protesters, spy the schemes they might imply and even blackmail them" (Hoffmann & Kornweitz, 2011). Amnesty International (as cited in Hoffmann & Kornweitz, 2008) even reports that Iranians who expressed their political views during and after the election period in social media, have "subsequently locked up and tortured". To sum it up, it can be said that new social media also has its own flaws in elaborating political interest and movement.

NEW SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Schulz (2004, cited in Hjarvard, 2008) identifies the role of new social media in general related to social change in terms of human communication and interaction. First, it

enables the expansion of communication irrespective of both time and space; second, it complements the face-to-face social activities; third, it facilitates combination of activities to be conducted at the same time and finally, it forces the users to adapt their behaviour according to its valuation, formats and routines. As discussed earlier, new social media such as Facebook and Twitter are potentially able to change the character of our social live. Prominent example for this argument is U.S. President Barack Obama's election in 2008. As cited from Langlois et all (2009), Obama's Facebook groups greatly aggregated 1.2 millions of his supporters during the presidential campaign. Addressed by Hoffmann & Kornweitz (2011) as medium of "direct citizen participation", this public aggregation via Facebook does remarkably magnify the engagement of society to the campaign itself, by extending their social activities/participation such as informing others about campaign events, attempting to persuade donations or taking part in activities related to politics without having to sit down face to face. Therefore, it is likely clear that new social media can be prospective tool for spurring social change, with stressing point that it played a facilitating as well as mediating role in connections and interactions among its user in society.

There are two main explanations for this claim to be apprehended. Firstly, new social media enable creation of dense network that extend human communication abilities. According to technological determinism purposed by McLuhan (Berger, 2007) the world now is a global village, where physical distance is even less of a hindrance to the real-time communicative activities of people.

Therefore social spheres are greatly expanded by the openness of the web and the ease at which people can search for online communities and interact with others that share the same interests and concerns. In Obama's case, The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that it is a "record breaking more than 50% of Americans in the 2008 US presidential election used the internet and social media like Facebook or Twitter to share their views, get the news about the campaign and learn more about the race" (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). Hence, Facebook serves the people's interest in a platform that enables them to communicate regardless their physical location.

Secondly, new social media with its quick dissemination of information support prompt interaction of virtual community. It means the information on the new social media can be posted and received immediately. Moreover, billions of audiences are able to share and receive information on the same platform at the same time. Equipped with features that allow users to be more interactive and collaborative, new social media becomes a form of mediated communication that gives the audience access to on-demand content and the ability to share and discuss it with others within seconds. For example, quick spread of info on Japanese's Tsunami and Earthquake had induced direct responds from people around the globe. Addison (2011) asserts in one of his reports that once images and videos of Japan's tsunami hitting the web within minutes count from the first wave hit Sendai, thousands of messages were then updated via Twitter where people were sharing and showing of good will, condolences and offering aid for Japan. Twitter, Facebook and other social networking sites even became

connecting tools for the victims as they "became a lifeline for many when mobile phone networks and some telephone landlines collapsed in the hours following the 8.9 scale earthquake" (Wallop, 2011). Therefore, the information on the new social media has allowed the people to interact more easily because it could be disseminated much faster.

However, even though the new social media provide the material, communicational and social means for a public to exist as well as interact easier, the idea of new community in Facebook did not make Obama win his Presidency which fully agreed by Boyd (2008) by saying that "when it comes to virtual community, exchanging gossip is far more common than voting", nor everyone who join Japanese Earth Quake raise fund group become full-timer philanthropy agent. It is obviously known that new social media also empowers some appalling behaviours to be performed. For instance, the case of Megan Meier, which suicide was attributed to cyber-bullying through the social networking website is showing how a common negative form in society start to take place in cyber environment.. Online identity theft is also being reported as one of the severe consequences in terms of easiness of sharing personal information in new social media. One of prominent examples of online identity theft in Facebook is Bryan Rutberg's case. Many of Bryan's friends had fallen prey to false status posted by the impostor; one of them even directly sent \$2,400 to a Western Union in London upon knowing the status. Although Bryan claimed that he already utilized the privacy setting, his frequent posting of personal information, in order to maintain his virtual social interaction, remain to be assumed as the main cause

of this online identity theft (Perez & Timm, 2010). In conclusion, new social media may also bring negative impacts to the society.

NEW SOCIAL MEDIA AND CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES

Singh (2010) identifies cultural context as “cultural values of elites and masses, the societal values, ethnic, language. “It emerges from various subjects such as procedures, stories and artefacts that shape up the theoretical ideology of a society. Singh also explains that in discussing relation between new social media and culture, both should not be separated from innovation which plays a key role in the issue. New social media facilitate innovation to be manifested in many forms and as a consequence, they contribute to whole process of the shifts of people’s value in every sphere. In other words, it acts as the “catalyst” for the evolving pattern in the society. Nonetheless, new social media has positive as well as negative consequence in cultural dimension.

Positively, new social media platforms offer more opportunities for indigenous culture to be greatly discussed. Specifically that new social media is more about user-generated content; it allows users to convey minor topic as explained by Langlois et al (2009) that “Facebook allowed for the emergence of marginalized issues to public. Likewise, it may also enrich the cultural roots that represent users’ cultural identities. For example, Facebook serves as a place where Diaspora communities may refer to. Negatively, new social media has also change the culture of human relationship as clarifies by Singh “from collectivism to individualism”. People’s orientation of togetherness has shifted from conventional neighbourhood to an exclusive network of common interests.

In addition, it also induces what Cohen (1981, cited in Singh, 2010) called as “moral panic”, a condition where person or people become a major concern to societal values. Parents are worry what the new technology will bring to youth generation as it changes so fast with no exact purpose or direction.

CONCLUSION

To sum it up, new social media such as Facebook and Twitter are platforms that can be utilized by their users with any kind of purposes such as organizing political movement, improving the social interaction as well as contributing to cultural advancement especially in terms of providing fast and quick informational system. Similarly, new social media may also enclose negative consequences which alternately rebound the whole scheme. However, further researches are needed when the new social media platforms’ policies are taken into consideration. In addition to that, templates used in various new social media may also trigger different effects to their users motivation. Therefore, future studies on this topics are strongly suggested.

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