

Positive Effects of Social Media on Social Movement

Wayne Walcot

Creative Media and Journalism, Middlesex University London

ABSTRACT

Social media refers to the means of interactions through web based technology among people in which they create and exchange information, ideas and opinions in virtual communities and networks. Social media affects all issues in the modern world, including social movements and has grown to become an integral part of our everyday lives. The impact of social media on social movements has been felt worldwide in recent years, affecting both developing and developed countries. Interestingly, the intensive use of social media has been a common denominator in the popular demonstrations that have occurred in the past few years over the world. Social movements have been influenced by social media, particularly with respect to their organization and communication. There has always been links between social movements and social media. Social media has been addressed at large from the point of view of their effects on the repertoires, dynamics and outcomes of movements. Social movement uses social media as communicative resources to make possible their mobilisation, publicity and political influence strategies. This review therefore aims to explore other positive effects of social media on social movement.

Keywords: Social media, Social movement, Activism, MeToo, MAGA

INTRODUCTION

Social media has grown to become an integral part of our everyday lives. People aged 15-19 spend an average of three hours on social media while people 20-29 spend an average of two hours a day [1]. Social media has become an essential part of our lives as a vital tool of different kinds of communication which is equipped with the ability to air ideas, share views, mould opinion, connecting individuals and society as whole [2].

Today's media involve human networks that enhance connectivity. In other words, social media facilitate interaction among people and connote a social value [3]. Social media also refers to the means of interactions through web based technology among people in which they create and exchange information, ideas and opinions in virtual communities and networks [4]. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0", and that allow

the creation and exchange of user generated content [5].

Furthermore, the availability of social media on mobile phones and web-based technologies gave an easy access to interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, discuss, co-create and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals [6]. Social media enhances connectivity between friends, families, colleagues, celebrities and their fans, and the world and its news.

A social movement is a social process through which collective actors articulate their interests, voice grievances and critiques, and proposed solutions to identified problems by engaging in a variety of collective actions. Social movements have three features. They are conflictual and have clearly identified (ideological) opponents. They are

structured through dense informal networks. And finally, they are geared towards developing, sustaining and sharing collective identities [7].

Social movements have been the driver behind overwhelming societal changes and paradigm shifts for hundreds of years. Social movements are characterized as an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively a problem that they feel they have in common [8]. Although social movements have been around for centuries, these movements began employing the use of social media to further the various causes and gain widespread support over the last several years. In America's short history, social movements have radically shaped the history of this country: The American Revolution, Abolishment of Slavery, Women's Rights, Civil Rights and more recently, the Human Rights movements. These movements have the power to unite massive amounts of people under one cause [9].

Over the last two decades, social movements have been increasingly relying on new communication technologies, and more recently, social media, to mobilize their own members, reaching out to new ones, and engaging with key societal actors, such as news media and decision makers [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]. Social media have greatly empowered protesters [movements] in three key areas: public attention, evading censorship, and coordination or logistics [14].

The Media and Social Movements

There has always been links between social movements and the media. The media have been addressed at large from the point of view of their effects on the repertoires, dynamics and outcomes of movements [15]. Social movement uses the media as communicative resources to make possible their mobilisation, publicity and political influence strategies [16]; [17]; [18].

In the pre-internet times when the mainstream news media dominated the mass communication environment, social movements centralized the professional

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production of news and enabled one-to-many distribution of information in a short period of time. These outlets had the power to reach large publics [19]. During the 1970s and 1980s, social movement theorists found evidence that the mainstream media were used by social movement organizations as publicity platforms to reach isolated constituents and disseminate their collective action frames [20]; [21]. The organisations could raise awareness and raise funds among potential supporters, while disseminating information that could mobilise the public opinion and influence on decision-making processes [22]; [23].

In times of greater technological sophistication, and increasing use of social media to coordinate action and mobilise people, social movement publicity strategies have not dismissed the mainstream news coverage. Media coverage persists as relevant because elite debates take place in the mainstream news, and therefore offer a space for social movement to find/convince potential donors and tell political officers about their demands [24]. The advent of advanced ICTs changed the media ecology drastically, and the academic production soon found new incentives to reframe much discussion on social movements and communication practices.

Social media changed the game because they offered large-scale communications, as their predecessors, but with newer possibilities of unfiltered deliberation and coordination between individuals, and a participatory design [25]; [26]. Authors contended that mobilisation and organisation became more efficient via online media because of the low costs of building a large-scale communication infrastructure in comparison with producing alternative media outlets and managing the filters of the mainstream news media [27]. At internal level, social movements are composed of constituent networks that require an intimate space to explore affinity, negotiate collective identity and facilitate cultural production [28]; [29].

Social media have enabled more encompassing cultural production/dissemination because of their large reach [30]; [31]. Due to their interactive nature, they have also stimulated discussion and faster spread of collective feelings [32]. There is vast evidence of social movements using blogs, Twitter and Facebook to enable their individual supporters to disclose and share relevant news, often in a viral, interactive and half-anonymous way [33]. Extant literature has shown how social movements rely on the affordances of different types of media to communicate with their publics. Nonetheless, for a number of researchers this academic production has a big shortcoming. By focusing on each new media development at a time, the broader picture has been missed, ignoring that empirically the communication environment is much more complex. These scholars argue that newer online media did not replace older media, and the mainstream media firms continuously explore offline and online formats and sources simultaneously. This premise led to the theory of hybrid media ecology, which has allowed understanding media innovations in their interaction with older media [34].

The Media and Social Activism

Before now research had little to say about the precise role of communication and communicative practices in social movements and in the construction of collective identities and protest movements, their sustainability or the development and spread of contentious politics. This is surprising as communication and mediation can be positioned as a pivotal component in a wide variety of mobilizations and struggles throughout history. The emergence of digital networked technologies has led to the convergence of channels of distribution and communication formats including social media.

The profound impact of networked technologies on societies economically, socially and politically has led some to claim that we have entered a new era of

Information, Network or Knowledge Society. The emergence of the Internet has resulted in a polarized scholarly debate about the impact and normative consequences of ICTs and particularly social media. However, even sceptics of the potential of ICTs to primarily alter power relations in society acknowledge the opportunities for disadvantaged groups to self-represent themselves, communicate independently and organise transnationally. Social media are playing an increasingly constitutive role in organizing social movements and in mobilizing on a global level.

Some studies focus on identifying the types of use of social media by social movements and activists and the variety of media and communicative practices that are being developed. These practices serve certain functions and fulfill certain roles in support of organising, coordinating and engendering social change. These developments have an impact on social networks and social ties which are important to understand to make sense of the relational aspects of mobilisation and organisation.

Activism in the Age of Social Media

#BlackLivesMatter hashtag was first coined following the acquittal of George Zimmerman who shot dead an unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin. Since then, #BlackLivesMatter has become an archetypal example of modern protests and political engagement on social media. A Pew Research Center analysis of public tweets finds that the hashtag has been used nearly 30 million times on Twitter, an average of 17,002 times per day as of May 1, 2018.

The conversations surrounding this hashtag often center on issues related to race, violence and law enforcement, and its usage periodically surges surrounding real-world events. Prominently examples were during the police-related deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile and the subsequent shooting of police officers in Dallas, Texas, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in July 2016.

The rise of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag along with others like #MeToo and #MAGA

(Make America Great Again) has sparked a broader discussion about the effectiveness and viability of using social media for political engagement and social activism. Certain groups of social media users most notably, those who are black or Hispanic view these platforms as an especially important tool for their own political engagement. For example, roughly half of black social media users say these platforms are at least somewhat personally important to them as a venue for expressing their political views or for getting involved with issues that are important to them. Those shares fall to around a third among white social media users.

At the same time, the public as a whole expresses mixed views about the potential broader impact these sites might be having on political discourse and the nature of political activism. Some 64% of Americans feel that the statement “social media help give a voice to underrepresented groups” describes these sites very or somewhat well. But a larger share say social networking sites distract people from issues that are truly important (77% feel this way), and 71% agree with the assertion that “social media makes people believe they’re making a difference when they really aren’t.” Blacks and whites alike offer somewhat mixed assessments of the benefits and costs of activism on social media. But larger majorities of black Americans say these sites promote important issues or give voice to underrepresented groups, while smaller shares of blacks feel that political engagement on social media produces significant downsides in the form of a distracted public or “slacktivism.”

Social media use has grown rapidly over the last decade. Today, Americans use a range of social media sites and are increasingly turning to these platforms to get news and information. Social networking sites have also emerged as a key venue for political debate and discussion and at times a place to engage in civic-related activities. One of the most prominent recent examples is the role

social media has played in the emergence of the “Me Too” movement aimed at raising awareness around sexual harassment and assault.

July 2018 marked the fifth anniversary of the use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, one of the most sustained efforts during this time to bring attention to a cause using social media platforms. In light of these and other debates about the impact of social media, the Pew Research Center fielded a survey to assess the current state of Americans’ experiences with and views related to political engagement on social media. There are a number of ways Americans can be politically active on social media. This survey asked about five specific actions people may take on these sites and finds that some activities are more common than others.

In Pew Research Center survey taken in 2018, 34% of Americans reportedly have taken part in a group on social media that shares an interest in an issue or cause, while a similar share (32%) says they have encouraged others to take action on an issue that is important to them. Smaller shares have used these platforms recently to find information about rallies or protests happening in their area, change their profile picture to show their support for a cause, or use hashtags related to a political or social issue. Taken together, 53% of U.S. adults have engaged in at least one of these activities on social media in the last year.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to report participating in many of these activities recently on social media. Most notably, Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans (by a 24% to 9% margin) to say they have used social media in the past year to look up information about rallies or protests happening in their area. However, notable shares of Americans belonging to each party have done some sort of politically related activity on social media recently: 59% of Democrats have performed at least one of these five activities the Center measured, as have 45% of Republicans.

Engagement in these activities also varies by age: Americans ages 18 to 49 are more

likely than those ages 50 and up to have recently changed their profile picture to show support for a cause (23% vs. 13%), looked for information on social media about rallies or protests in their area (24% vs. 13%), or used hashtags related to a political or social issue (20% vs. 8%). There are, however, more modest and less consistent differences in performing these actions by race and ethnicity or by gender.

Roles and Functions of Social Media for Activism

One of the main differences in roles and functions that have been identified is between internal/inward roles and external/outward roles. Inward roles refer to organisation, coordination, internal debate and decision making. Outward roles relate to mobilisation, recruitment, attack strategies and the creation of alternative or independent channels of communication that contribute to a vibrant public sphere.

Social media is used by protest movements and activists in a number of diverse ways. Activists use ICT-supported communicative practices to organize internally, recruit and network, mobilize for and coordinate direct action, disseminate movement frames independently of the mainstream, and discuss/debate/deliberate/decide. They also use ICT-based communicative practices to attack ideological enemies, surveil the surveillers and preserve protest artefacts.

Inward-oriented communicative action relates to the potential of social media to make internal organisation more efficient through the mediation of internal communication. The use of social media may lower the transaction costs of participation which, in turn, potentially fosters recruitment and retention of recruits. Social media are seen as being instrumental in enabling more fluid membership and asynchronous participation, although this potential should not be exaggerated. Lower costs do not automatically lead to higher overall levels of political participation.

Furthermore, the continuing importance of face-to-face communication for building trust and keeping information safe from state security services has to be emphasized too in this regard. Another feature of social media is that they increase the ability of social movements to organise across borders on a transnational level, to link up with other organisations building large networks that overcome time/space constraints, potentially leading to movement spill-over. Social media play an important role in facilitating the mobilisation for, and coordination of, direct actions offline.

Social media enable activists and protest movements to 'self-mediate' and to distribute movement goals or frames more easily. Social movements and activists have always done this, but social media are said to greatly increase the capacity to transmit text and visual discourses. It is often argued that social media potentially provide (new) opportunities for citizens and subordinate groups in society to bypass state and market controls and the mainstream media to construct alternative collective identities.

In addition, social media tools can potentially facilitate internal debate among activists. Online forums and mailing lists are used extensively and these tools are considered an integral part of many movements, to the extent that some have started to use online platforms and forums for decision-making [35]. This has been studied mainly from the perspective of how online deliberation has the potential to strengthen the public sphere.

In recent years, a number of other roles that are related more to Internet-based practices than to Internet-supported practices, i.e. they are more constitutive than instrumental, have forcefully asserted themselves. The network is used against the network, indeed activists are using the Internet and social media platforms as weapons to strike at their ideological enemies. ICTs are therefore being used as instruments of direct action as "hacktivist" tactics demonstrate [6]. An

example of this is the tactic of *sousveillance* – surveilling the surveillers or bottom-up surveillance by citizens/activists on the state or public figures.

Pervasive handheld cameras on mobile phones used with networked infrastructures and platforms have made this tactic possible. *Sousveillance* is the result of what [11] calls the synoptic viewer society or the many watching the few. The filming and photographing of police behaviour during demonstrations can be seen as a passive aggressive counter-tactic to monitor and expose police or state-sponsored violence. Social media are used to distribute content uploaded by protesters which can go viral and may be picked up by international media. *Sousveillance* tactics played an

Social media has been immensely instrumental in making the world a global village, enabling information to be disseminated over a wide range in the shortest possible time. The implications of social media for activism are immense. The social media is apparently an effective tool to mobilize and galvanise support for social movements. Social

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important role during the student protests in the United Kingdom in 2011 and during the Arab Spring.

Closely linked to *sousveillance*, social media provide an archive, a memory and a repository of text and audio-visual symbolic content relating to protests, tactics, organisations, and ideas. The self-mediations of protesters and activists contribute to a global archive of protest artifacts. The permanent nature of these artifacts enables the symbols embedded in these discourses to be culturally transmitted, feeding struggles and contributing to a collective memory of protest. In this way, social movements transfer knowledge and can influence future movements through what is called movement spillover.

CONCLUSION

media has proved to be an essential medium of expression and organization for the social demonstrations. It is a means of communication to which much of the world population has access, reconfiguring the map of relationships, in which ideas and information flow and some boundaries become fluid.

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