

Relationship between New Media and Democracy

* Ashima Singh Gureja

New media is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the later part of the twentieth century. For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of New Media is the “democratization” of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. What distinguishes new media from **traditional media** is the digitizing of content into bits. There is also a dynamic aspect of content production which can be done in real time, but these offerings lack standards and have yet to gain traction.

New media in simpler terms is a medium of communication which is new for the society and its public. Here new refers to that technology which is contemporary and have evolved after rigorous research. Cyberspace is an integral part of new medium. Democracy is also a contemporary system of governance which means freedom and equality in the society. New media and democracy are those two system through which the information dissemination can be done in an environment of freedom and equality.

What all new media is capable of doing?

New media, particularly the internet, provides the potential

* Asstt. Professor, Media Studies, Technia Institute of Advanced Studies, GGSIP University, New Delhi.

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for a democratic post modern public sphere, in which citizens can participate in well informed, non-hierarchical debate pertaining to their social structures.

- New media alter the meaning of geographic distance.
- New media allow for a huge increase in the volumes of communication
- New media provides the possibility of increasing the speed of communication.
- New media provides opportunities for interactive communication.

Some of the early work into new media studies was guilty of technological determinism.

New media gives individual the power to control the flow of information experience and resources.

As a result of evolution of new media technologies, globalization occurs more than expansion of activities beyond the boundaries of particular nation states. Globalization shortens the distance between people all over the world by the electronic communication.

Changes in the new media environment creates a series of tensions in the concept of public sphere.

Public sphere is defined as a process through which public communication becomes restructured partly disembedded from national, political and cultural institutions.

Virtual communities are being established online and transcend geographical boundaries, eliminating social restrictions. New media has the ability to connect like minded people world wide.

The use of digital computers has transformed the remaining 'old' media. Image manipulation softwares like Adobe Photoshop and Desktop Publishing Tools.

by state or commerce has been accompanied by a boom in experiments using CMC to encourage democratic participation. These projects have attempted to use such 'new media' to offer new channels of access to the main transactions of democracy: information provision, preference measurement (voting),

deliberation, and will formation/group organization. Many information based services are also being delivered via new media. Initiatives range from using city hall web pages as a more efficient means to make political information available to those who use the internet, to experiments in electronic voting, to encouraging all citizens to use interactive media to organize interest groups and neighbourhood alliances.

Case Studies

1. SMS One Pune, Maharashtra

SMSOne establishes Short Message Service [SMS]-based local media by reaching out to communities through their mobiles, allowing them to receive useful information about their daily lives on issues such as health, government services and political information like elections, community events or education. This service enables deprived young people and dropouts from school to self-employ themselves by becoming the community mediators, sending targeted SMS to different groups within their community. These young people are able to get earnings and the system is financed essentially through local businesses advertising and by charging few paise per message.

Practice Background

Mobile penetration has incredibly grown in India over the past years and at the beginning of 2009, there were more than 370 million subscribers, many of them coming from rural areas. However, even if the masses have an access to mobile connectivity, most of the handsets'

potential is still untapped - as the content delivered is often not directly related to their livelihood and their environment. Rural communities certainly need local information concerning health, education, government services and other valuable information that can improve their livelihood and meet their daily needs.

On the other hand, opportunities in rural areas for young people are very weak and rural education does not cover rural necessities and does not meet the requirements of local communities. In this context, young people, especially dropouts, are often unemployed or are forced to migrate to the cities looking for jobs. Providing occupation to these people in their own locality is essential to prevent massive migration.

SMSOne tackles these two problems at the same time. First, it fills the information gap existing in more than 500 villages in Maharashtra, updating its members through the local-based SMS newsletter with local news and other community-related information. The system is able to distribute messages to targeted communities, thus increasing its impact. SMSOne is a useful tool to transmit urgent information at any time and can be used to alert people about natural disasters, epidemic diseases and send other critical information. Secondly, SMSOne gives young dropouts the opportunity to self-employ themselves and earn monthly revenue, contributing at the same time to the development of their community.

2. New media and democracy: The Egypt Turmoil

While the ultimate outcome in Egypt is undetermined, the unrest and the government's response to it have demonstrated once again the power of new media in moving masses and shaping events.

While it is comforting to believe that new media help tip the balance of power in favour of democracy, the reality is more complex.

In Egypt, the government took another step. Rather than just

shutting down and blocking new media technologies (which the government did), Cairo took the entire country offline. On Jan. 28, at 22:34 GMT, the country's four Internet service providers cut all access to the Internet. It was a remarkably simple act, but one with potentially enormous consequences, as it cut off the country from the digital world. Any company now thinking about doing business in Egypt must consider the possibility of a similar cutoff in the future. Current circumstances may be exceptional, but it is hard to believe they will not arise again. The prospect of a repeat of protests and another cutoff will do great harm to the government's hope of being perceived as a regional economic power.

What should be even more disturbing to the government is how ineffective such moves are. Protesters have resorted to dial-up modems to connect via phone line to out-of-country servers. Copy machines are being put into use and one 26-page pamphlet has been widely distributed by hand.

Experts doubt that networking tools actually generate protest. There is little if any evidence that they push happy citizens into the streets. There are many forms of communication during periods of unrest and there is little proof that "tweets" or Facebook posts are any more effective than word of mouth. Real outrage is not generated in 140 characters.

Another way that social media shape situations is by shining a spotlight on events outside the country in which they are occurring. Governments that control the media can merely ignore events they do not wish to see made public or shape the reporting of them. That is much harder — if not impossible — when cell phones upload video to the Internet for distribution worldwide. That attention has an impact, forcing other governments to respond to those developments.

The idea that Mr. Mubarak is under pressure from the U.S. to step

down or reform emboldens the protesters as well. This is one of the more powerful uses of new media. It pressures both governments and the governments that must deal with them. This is one of the few certainties in this new media environment.

Conclusion

The New Media is an unique feature of modern society. It's development has accompanied an increase in the magnitude and complexity of societal actions and engagements, rapid social change, technological innovation, rising personal income and standard of life and the decline of some traditional forms of control and authority. There is an association between the development of new media and social change, although the degree and direction of this association is still debated upon even after years of study into media influence. Many of the consequences, either detrimental or beneficial, which have been attributed to the new media, are almost undoubtedly due to other tendencies within society. Few sociologists would refuse the importance of the new media, and mass communications as a whole, as being a major factor in the construction and circulation of social understanding and social imagery in modern societies. Therefore it is argued that the new media is used as "an instrument", both more powerful and more flexible than anything in previous existence, for influencing people into certain modes of belief and understanding within society.