Abstract

This paper discusses how the internet as a form of new media facilitates social movements. The nature of the public sphere and the structure and formation of society needs to be considered to understand how the internet will be useful, or how the internet changes social structures. Different theories of how information and media affect social and political decision making are also discussed.

The revolutionary nature of the internet has changed information flow and control, and there are several real-world instances which can be used as an example. The discussion enabled several criteria to be derived which will be helpful in evaluating these examples. The Battle for Seattle, Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement are evaluated using its use of communication, democratic-ness of the movement and the nature of the community.

The findings indicated that some of the basic assumptions about the Arab Spring and OWS may be incorrect. The OWS movement was found to be more similar to the Battle in Seattle rather than Arab Spring as claimed. Furthermore Arab Spring may be a mis-nomer as it should not be considered a singular phenomenon. It is a collection of multiple phenomena where each country had its own revolution.
Bottom up Globalization: How The Internet Empowers Social Movements
Anushke Guneratne

Introduction

Societies are constantly evolving, adapting to new situations and adopting from other societies. A society will remain relatively stable when it is not exposed to different situations and its values and beliefs are generated and taught from within. In the past, societies were spatially isolated with distance playing a key role in minimizing contact among societies. But with increasing globalization, frequent contact between societies is unavoidable.

Information Communication Technologies (ICT), chiefly the internet, is pushing societies closer together, mixing values and beliefs that would not have come into contact before. Values and beliefs are changing contexts and are being absorbed and reinterpreted in these global networks, with outcomes ranging from adoption to outright rejection. Is the internet causing the formation of a new society which contains the values of the former societies? In addition, whose values and beliefs will dominate this new society?

Understanding the nature of the internet, social power dynamics, and their interaction will be crucial observing how society is changed or events interpreted. Contemporary literature is filled with ideas as to how this change occurs, and what the new society might become. This paper attempts to explore some of the dominant ideas of media influence on society, and analyze current social trends; namely community formation of social movements in an international context, and the characteristics of these movements. This paper will analyze one documented movement (Battle in Seattle) and two new movements (Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street) in an attempt to discover any commonalities which are present and also discuss any matters or recommendations which will be needed in understanding and dealing with these movements.

Social Structure and the Public

Information and Social Structure

In order to trace the impact of the current information revolution brought on by the internet, it is necessary to understand the importance information in its relationship with society. In his book *The Myth of The Machine*, Mumford (1966) presents an interesting idea of how information was crucial to the formation of bureaucracies and administration. He presents the organization of society by ancient pharaohs in building the massive monuments of Egypt. The use of dictums and officials carrying out the wishes of a single person is equivalent to information generated at the source (the king) flowing down through the bureaucracy/administration (information network) to the population to be carried out. Information in that age was used as a tool to dominate, with the person who has control of the network being able to enforce order and authority.

Network control therefore seems to be an important feature when information and social organization relate to each other. However this pre-supposes that a network for information flow is already in place. Which means that the existence of a society implies both a structure and a network for information to flow which (the network) when controlled can cause the society to be modified.

Therefore it is possible to infer that when Mumford refers to the death of a king resulting in the ‘machine’ breaking down, what actually takes place is the loss of control. In traditional
monarchical societies this will be solved by the network being placed under the control of another king, or successor. The absence of a suitable successor will result in struggles among candidates which will tear up the network. History is full of examples of empires falling apart (the splintering of the Alexander’s Greek empire, the state of the Roman empire with different emperors) in the absence of a ruler, when the ‘social network’ reorganizes itself into smaller components. (key ideas: networks, network control, organization and re-organization)

**Social Structure and the Public Sphere**

An important part of society is the public sphere, where matters important to the public are brought up and opinions formed in relation to governance. Habermas (1974) states that the public sphere will mediate between society and state; where the public organizes itself to communicate the public’s opinion. However the concept of a public sphere and a public opinion had formed only in the 18th century.

Historically authority had been vested in feudal lords and the structure positioned the lord as representative of the public, and most often due to the non-separation of responsibilities private opinion and interest was the same as the public opinion (the economic and social interest of the lord and his family was the interest towards which resources were focused). However this authority disintegrated in a long process of polarization resulting in the separation of the private interest and public interest. Those with private interest assembled as a body became the public sphere (initially this sphere consisted of the bourgeois) while the sphere in which authority was invested in became the state (Habermas, 1974).

The formation of the public sphere created a forum for public discourse the elite (composed of the literate, who were also economically powerful), became bearers of public opinion. Later as the diffusion of propaganda increased it resulted in the expansion of the public sphere, and the public sphere lost its former exclusivity (Habermas, 1974). This trend will supposedly reverse when the bourgeois attempt to retake the public sphere and create exclusivity once more.

Habermas (1974) refers to this as the “re-feudalization” of the public sphere where large organizations strive for political compromise in favor of ‘personal (organizational)’ interest with the state. In such instances public interest is minimized as much as possible, with actual public support garnered through pseudo-openness.

This pseudo-openness is created by using media and publicity to appease and gain public favor. Bennet (2003b) refers to the collapse of meaningful discourse in the mainstream media as cause for lack of participation by the general public. However he presents the openness of the internet as being able to fill the gap occurring in mainstream media. The internet can be a medium where the general public may reclaim the public sphere, when the main stream media is co-opted by private interests.

Habermas (1974) asserts that for the public opinion to function, the participants or citizens need to be able to confer in an unrestricted fashion, with freedom of assembly and association are guaranteed along with the freedom to express and publish their opinions on matters of general interest. He mentions that in large public bodies special types of communication will be needed to both transmit to the body and to influence those who receive it.
Bennet (2003b) mentions the rise of a global activist movement aimed at bringing social justice to the neo-liberal world economic regime. According to him, these movements are using the internet to coordinate activities, plan protests, and publicize high quality information about their causes. For example it was possible for the revolutionary movements of the Arab Spring to keep the global media updated on a daily basis. He adds that these information networks have not only managed to slip under the radar of conventional media, but have also discovered methods to pass important information to the conventional media and thereby use it for their purpose. Bennet (2003b) also asserts that these movements have been able to work successfully despite being lumped under a category called ‘anti-globalization’ movement by conventional media.

Combining the views of Habermas (1974) on media and the public sphere with what Bennet (2003b) says about the use of the internet by activist groups, it would seem that the internet with its openness is the perfect medium for a large public sphere to formulate their opinions in. The requirements of communication for a public sphere; ability to confer in an unrestricted fashion, freedom of assembly, association, expression and publishing opinions on matters of general interest as described by Habermas (1974) are features of the internet which are being used by these movements.

But the key assumption is that the internet will remain open. So it must be explored as to whether the internet can be prevented from being open. Similar to how conventional media are being used by organizations to influence the public and further their own interests, it is possible that the ‘new media’ internet will also follow the same cycle resulting in the loss of the public sphere which we now see active in the ‘social justice’ movements. (Key ideas: public sphere, organizing publics, media and public sphere, co-opting public sphere for private interests)
Communication in non-controllable distributed networks has a large transformative potential (Bennet, 2003b). Bennet (2003b) refers to Redden who says that the decentralized nature of the internet facilitates for a largely leaderless formation of groups which makes it hard for established organizations to exert control. He also says that what the internet and associated technologies have done is to speed up the process and reduce the cost of basic communication, with a cautionary note that it is so only for those who have crossed the digital divide. Deibert (2000) mentions that the internet is used for; a) as a tool of communicating information and updates very fast, b) propagating the interpretation of the information by these groups, i.e., communicating their views, and c) as a tool to bring pressure down on traditional organizations (or big business) by garnering massive public protest with the aim of influencing regulation. In addition to the basic communication offered the use of streaming media has enriched the quality of the information which is being carried on the network.

But Bennet (2003b) adds that the internet despite its distinctive features that allow for the flourishing of movements is still just a communication medium. For the structural changes which are to occur in society people must be motivated by their environments to use the capacities of the internet (Bennet, 2003b).

Latour (1987) in his chapter “Centers of Calculation” presents a model for information accumulation which would have fitted the above description of using networks had it been an established organization. Latour’s (1987) chapter refers to the early exploration cycles carried out by the empires with the use of slow medium like letters and journals carried by persons on ships. The information was thus subject to loss and relied on a single center to compile it so that it can be utilized in future cycles of exploration. Latour (1987) presents mobility, combinability and stability as a requirement for the cycle to occur. Can Latour’s (1987) model be adaptable to accommodate the characteristics of the internet as presented by Bennet (2003b)? If so, the model will have to accommodate the decentralized nature of the ‘center’. Figure 1 is an attempt at adapting the knowledge accumulation cycle to represent the operation of the public spheres dissemination and formation of public opinion.

![Diagram of established organization and nodes](image-url)
In this model (figure 1) each node (a dynamic online activist community) has its own cycle of accumulation and ‘calculation’. This model also shows that the ‘traditional center’ which used to be in-charge of the cycle no longer being a center. However due to the history associated with such a center an established organization would still be able to affect the environment within which the nodes operate (Habermas, 1974). This would be the use of conventional media to influence opinion or to engage in practices such as lobbying to influence the state and any policy or legislation which are directly in contact with the environment of the nodes. Deibert (2000) sums it up as “those with the money and the fast connections… have the loudest voice”.

It is interesting to note that combinability which is an essential feature for the ‘traditional center’ to operate has a potential to be greatly impaired in a modern context. i.e., the nodes or groups acting as centers themselves will be able to overwhelm the capacity of a single center, as well as the fact that some of the nodes by holding conflicting views and ideas will be able to prevent combination. i.e., that is creates a “logistical nightmare of thousands upon thousands of niche interest groups buzzing around every conceivable international forum where nothing is achieved but endless gridlock” (Deibert, 2000).

Pottier (1996) in the chapter “Modern Information Warfare versus Empirical Knowledge: Framing ‘The Crisis’ in Eastern Zaire” presents a case that can draw parallels to this network interaction. However the parallels take place in an international context with the Rwandan government playing the role of an ‘established organization’. Though Pottier (1996) does not elaborate in great detail, the presence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and academics who bear the story different from the official version presented by the government affects the operational environment in the international context. i.e., if placed in relation to the model in figure 1, the multiple nodes will be the NGOs and academics, the established organization will be the government of Rwanda. Operating in the environment of international opinion only the loudest voice is recognized (Habermas 1974, Bennet 2003b). However this case takes place in the absence of technological mediation in the form of internet.

Therefore what would an increase in information mobility have done in the case of Rwanda presented in Pottier’s (1996) case? Would international opinion have changed if the ‘nodes’ in the network had more information mobility and popular support among an international public, and were able to bring pressure on the international sphere? (Key ideas: leaderless networks, information flow, processing and value formation outside of a center, multiple narratives outside of the center, organized pressure on a sphere)

**Internet, Information and the Public**

The preceding sections clearly showed that information is a key component in how the Public and Internet are connected. Especially when considering the public sphere which has evolved in a cyclic pattern of public opinion being separated from private opinion and the mixing of the two (feudalization followed by creation of a public sphere and followed by re-feudalization) as indicated by Habermas (1974), the state of awareness is crucial for public opinion. This dependence of the public sphere with communication media is made considering that awareness (which is a requisite for the public sphere) is closely linked with information.
Looking at the interaction of information itself in a network (Figure 1), the process of forming an opinion (making ‘calculations’), require the flow of information (mobility) as it provides guidance to public opinion. There needs to be a medium where cheap and widespread information can flow without external influence on the information. The internet seems the perfect medium as it is both open and allows for information to be presented in its rawest form. Even though there have been incidents which prompt us to think whether the internet is truly open, its’ current openness is sufficient to allow communities of activists with fewer resources to release information (or noise) to a wide audience, which fits very well with the above requirements.

In the following sections an attempt will be made to discuss why and how society is so intricately intertwined with information and how communication is both important and insufficient for creating social movements. (Key idea: insufficiency of communication, society information interaction)

Information, Communication and Society

Strate (2009) in his essay brings in an aspect of information, which based Alfred Korzybski’s model says societies are capable of binding time. Time binding is in essence the ability to achieve progress through time.

The importance of the concept of time binding is that it means that knowledge can be passed down or around without loss. Using symbols, books and other media, discoveries of one generation can be passed down successive generations. However Strate (2009) mentions that the time binding ability can be used for increasing the space binding capacity of society. Improved communication or time binding capabilities can allow for empires to come into being. Mumford (1966), when he refers to the creation of the mega-machine or a society that has been bent to the will of the king, mentions the administrative hierarchy to disseminate commands, written by using scribes on a writing medium.

Latour (1987), when referring to the use of knowledge accumulation cycles, would also be in effect referring to the time-binding ability of the medium! If human society as mentioned by Strate (2009) is indeed set apart by its time-binding ability, then the use of internet as the medium of time-binding is set to revolutionize society. (Key ideas: time binding, passing of time bound information to advance society, time binding and spatial binding)

Informational Revolutions and Revolutions

Strate (2009) states that Korzybski came to “understand that what set human time-binding apart from animal behavior so very dramatically was the human capacity for language and symbolic communication” (371). Likewise he states that Innis argued that communication altered society by changing the interests (the things thought about), the character of symbols (things thought with) and changing the nature of the community environment (the arena in which thought developed).

The internet is a very recent development, with the idea of an interactive web or web 2.0 being even more recent. The fact that it is spreading faster and gives 2-way access due to the
interactive capability allows people with diverse backgrounds and even languages to have access to it. Societies (note: plural) which have been time-binding for years, with their own symbols and interests in perhaps relative isolation, now have a medium into which they can push the way they think, with symbols they are used to, about things they are interested in, and have a global reach with almost instant interaction from other interested people.

The interests of another society or persons can become someone else’s interest. Even though there is the possibility that people will shut out the interests of the ‘other’ by creating filters using software or other means, and despite the real possibility of de-contextualization, those willing to find common interests and themes will have access to others with similar ideas, or similar ideas in its rawest form.

Though the argument is present that the internet may go the way of mainstream media (mainstream media being considered newspapers, radio and television, the internet has a relative openness which the mainstream media (MSM) lacked, as will be discussed in the next section. (Key ideas: conflict of time bound ideas, enhanced exposure and de-contextualization and compatibility of different time bound values)

Where and how mainstream media fails social causes

According to Birkland & Lawrence (2009) the way MSM affects the public opinion and the public sphere is by ‘framing’. Framing is necessary due to limited human cognitive abilities, i.e., a person cannot comprehend events in their entirety due to lack of context. MSM with its propensity to be controlled will allow for the domination of the framing process and thereby dominate public opinion. A political actor in control of MSM will therefore be able to make claims of causes and solutions to problems, allowing public opinion to be focused towards a desired end (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009). This is essentially the same principle used in creating the mega-machine mentioned by Mumford.

Street (2005) uses three perspectives, which has been named pluralist, constructivist, and structuralist to discuss how MSM transforms politics. Though these approaches have co-existed, they have not significantly advanced understanding of the how media can influence politics. However these different responses share in common the idea that MSM plays a transformative role in politics while at the same time politics being able to transform MSM (Street, 2005).

Street (2005) using the work of Putnam and others who bemoan the negative effects of media from the pluralist perspective, blaming media for competing for scarce time, inhibiting social participation and undermining civic engagement. They claim mass media is one of the perpetrators affecting society negatively by eroding social capital. However a counter argument is given that social engagement now depends on: ‘Who (the source) says what (the content) through which channel (the media) to whom (the audience) with what effect’, and that this has a positive effect on engagement just that the effect is based on the individuals preferences, interests and disposition.

The constructivist approach contends that politics now exists as a collection of media events. One prominent writer Bob Franklin says that modern media privilege presentation over substance, appearance over policy. And debate on this issue is not as conflicting as that found in the pluralist debate. While opinions on this trend do not assert that there are positive effects of
this view, there are opinions which present a neutral stance saying that there is no effect. However if this view is valid it certainly holds a disturbing idea that politics will be ‘cooked’ up by the spin doctors, that is politics will not exist as a reality outside of journalism to be reported on, but rather exist as a media phenomenon organized and executed according to a plan (Street, 2005).

Additionally there is another constructionist view espoused by Thomas Meyer in his book *Media Democracy*, where Street (2005) says that there is a media logic affecting how politics is framed. This media logic first determines what events are ‘newsworthy’ to report, thereby filtering out most events, then presenting them in a way that captures public attention, usually by the use of dramatic stories.

The third perspective of structuralism has a focus on power, and considers the operation of media is part of a larger long term process of state building. Focusing on the educative power of media, one of its proponents Garnham\(^1\) says ‘Who can say what, in what form, to whom for what purposes, and with what effect will in part be determined by and in part determine the structure of economic, political, and cultural power in society.’ (28)

Kim & Vishak (2008) mentions a study which evidences how main stream media, especially network television news, is a major source of political information. As of November 2004, 48% of adults relied on entertainment media such as The Daily Show, The Tonight Show, and Late Night as a source of political information (Kim & Vishak, 2008). The large viewership and their ability to shape public opinion and susceptibility to control makes MSM unsuitable for social movements, which do not share the views of those who would control MSM.

Whether it’s the erosion of social capital by disengaging the public through competition for time, or targeted programming to targeted audiences with the intent of changing public opinion according to the pluralist views; or as the constructivist view holds the social events presented to the public are doctored to meet agendas; or according to structuralism media is used as part of constructing a state with its set of ideologies, it can be understood that the influence of MSM can be used for control. And due to the high cost involved in using MSM any communication propagated would be from established organizations that are able to afford these high costs, and would therefore be engaged in projects of re-feudalization (Habermas, 1974).

Using the three perspectives, it can clearly be seen that the one of the biggest weaknesses of MSM is its exclusiveness in content production capability, where programs and content decisions are made by relatively few producers who can be influenced. If the influence is from the society and is varied, the programming will be more representative of the diverse views. But if the influence is from those who might have a vested interest, they will use the programming to sway public opinion. This is how MSM differs from the internet, and how MSM becomes suitable for social movements. (Key ideas: MSM perspectives and social effects, framing and public opinion, point of control in MSM, openness of internet)

*Can the Internet stand in the gap for Democracy*

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\(^1\) Garnham, N. (2000) *Emancipation, the Media, and Modernity.*
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Dewey (1954) states that any invention which allows for concentration of population will result in the rise of democracy, and mentions that the printing press, the rail road and mass manufacture were all events that made democracy happen. He further states that democracy began in the small communities where discussion and agreement of how to approach local matters took place. Over time with many publics with diverse interests coming into the overall function of government, it is trivial matters which are being legislated rather than the important such as sanitation, health, transportation, immigration and education. Dewey (1954) is critical of the current democracy where the ‘counting of heads’ has become more important than attending to matters needed resolving. While he credits technological advancement with establishing the union of publics, he questions why the machine that creates the great society while disintegrating the small communities has failed to establish the great community. He concludes that:

“Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible.”

Taking into consideration what Dewey espouses, communication is important, not just one-way communication as was present in MSM, but communication that allows for discussion. Two-way communication, which is facilitated by the internet, would seem perfect for the building of the Great Community that Dewey envisioned. (Key ideas: Small scale democracy and large scale democracy, technology to maintain democracy, Great Society vs. Great Community)

The Strength of the Internet as a Social Catalyst

Bennet (2003a) comments that the SPIN model used for describing network organization is highly effective. SPIN stands for Segmented Polycephalous Integrated Networks. While he mentions that the SPIN model developed by Gerlach and Hine in 1970, he notes that a change was made where Polycephalous was changed to Polycentric, meaning social movements had several centers or were multi-hubbed, and that the cause for integration has shifted from ideology to more personal and fluid forms of association. The nature of the internet with its loose networking and allowance for groups to form based on fluid association is therefore quite suitable for the organization of social movements.

Organizing Activism

Stevenson (2010) notes that civil society is currently composed of organizations which want to reinstate patriarchy, ethnic nationalists, and religious fundamentalists. This leaves a huge problem in the terms of how giving each member or movement the right to be heard will advance the cause of civil society. This is the same issue Dewey (1954) points out where legislatures are embroiled in matters of science vs. religion while critical issues such as education, sanitation, and health go un-attended.

Stevenson (2010), recognizing the above problem and knowing how new media or the internet is bringing all these different groups into contact with each other, asks whether “new media technologies responsible for undermining a sense of community by robbing people of
participatory public spaces or are they the sites where more diversified relations of solidarity can be made?” (200).

While Stevenson (2010) refers to the pessimistic view of new media technologies changing society, thereby making the virtual world a place of private retreat and unlimited consumption, he counters this by saying

“What we are currently witnessing therefore is the de-individualization of modernity and the growth of more affective communities based less on utilitarian notions of self-interest than on sociality. The new tribes are based upon shared sentiments, whether they are regular visitors of an Internet site, readers of a football fanzine or even occasional viewers of a soap opera. These new emotional communities are constructed more upon fleeting identification and periodic warmth than the stability of traditional ties.’ (202)

The key idea to be noted is that there is a new form of associative socializing, which allows for broader solidarity to be established. It is the optimistic view that without the presence of traditional cultural gate-keepers to prevent mingling, the online community will be a forum to critically engage one another, making participatory democracy on a large scale a real possibility (Stevenson, 2010). (Key ideas: Social movement formation without deep ideological underpinnings, re-organization on common interests, multi-hubbed movements,)

Transitory Communities

The internet has allowed for the creation of permanent campaigns which can be sustained internationally for a longer period, compared to earlier movements. Bennet (2003a) identifies the following characteristics of the new global activist movements.

- **Permanent campaigns:** Centrally run campaigns can be stopped once the protest target has been achieved; therefore earlier campaigns resulted in discontinuation once the target of protest complied with the demands. With the new protest network, new charges against the target can be added quickly. Therefore the modern protests are more protracted in nature.

- **Communication in diverse networks is ideologically thin, but rich in terms of individual identity and lifestyle narratives:** Bennet (2003a) gives the example of United States Senator Orrin Hatch and consumer activist Ralph Nader of both being in the anti-Microsoft network as an example of this aspect. Ideologically weak networks allow for diverse often conflicting opinions to exist together for the purpose of organizing against a common target.

- **New media can alter information flows through the mass media:** While the internet allows its public spheres to be in touch and update on events at a very fast pace, the openness of mailing lists and other mass communications allow journalists from MSM to be able to participate and monitor the information. i.e., it creates pathways to MSM to be altered.

- **Network reconfiguration:** A combination of the permanent campaign and openness present from being ideologically thin, the activist network can quickly re-organize itself
to pick new targets, and allow more groups to join or leave without losing significant momentum.

These above qualities create an interesting community where the campaign itself can have a certain amount of permanency, while the actual community participating can change significantly. That is, a target may be campaigned against for one issue, which after being successfully altered due to campaign efforts will result in the interested communities withdrawing, but a new issue may be picked up and campaigned against by a new collection of communities. This is what will be called transitory communities. (Key ideas: key characteristics of modern social movements)

**Drawbacks and criticisms of the new democracy**

While it is quite clear that the internet has revolutionized revolutions, by its openness and accessibility creating a space for participatory democracy, it must nevertheless be accepted with a grain of salt. Though the internet has made communications cheaper, and the equipment needed for access is also considerably cheap, considering the global economic disparities the levels of access considered the norm in developed countries will be an exception and not the norm for developing countries.

Internet use projections in 2004 placed a higher estimate of 945 million users (Chen & Wellman, 2004). This accounts for 15% of the world’s population in 2004. Considering a conservative growth of 1% per year, it may be possible to estimate that the global internet usage would have just passed 20% recently, perhaps as high as 23%. The question can be raised as to who is participating in this 23%? It is likely that most of the 23% are in the developed world. But in a developing country it is quite likely that the user will be of the economically advantaged population. Is internet democracy more involved in the interests of the middle class population of the developed countries, and the rich of the developing?

These are questions that are raised in academic circles. Deibert (2000) maintains that it is important to understand that the Internet architecture favor some groups and social forces over others. This points to a need for policies and initiatives which will make the internet more accessible. Stevenson (2010) argues that “new media technology can contribute to the building of networks amongst new social movements that might serve to reinforce relations of dominance” (207). This is similar to the argument by Deibert (2000) where without proper policies to allow technology diffusion to less privileged classes of society, the internet will be a tool of dominance, rather than for participatory politics. It will clearly be another instance where the potential of the internet will be wasted by a form of ‘re-feudalization’ as mentioned by Habermas (1974) where the public sphere will be dominated by individuals who are interested in advancing private interests.

Deibert (2000) also refers to the belief that the internet is beyond regulation as a myth. The influence of states on the internet is clearly evident in the blocking and filtering of internet access in many countries with draconian regimes. The attempt in countries like Egypt and Libya during the more recent ‘Arab Spring’ by its former rulers to block internet access and hack the accounts of activists is evidence of this myth. In China, there is a creation of a ‘Great Firewall of China’ which has government sanctioned blocking and website poisoning. Even in the US there
were attempts to monitor internet communications as part of national security initiatives. But this is not without pushback from the internet community, who has created software which can tunnel through firewalls allowing access and protection to activists. (Key ideas: Myth of internet in relation to openness and participatory capacity)

Research Framework

Kahn (2004) declares that an international protest movement in resistance to neo-liberal institutions and their related globalization policies has surfaced while at the same time championing democracy, and social justice. Especially following the September 11 attacks on the US in 2001, young activists have continued to monitor, critique, and fight against aggressive versions of Western capitalism and imperialism being promoted by neo-liberal G8 countries. He asserts that subcultures of cyber-activists have been carrying out ‘globalization-from-below’ developing networks of solidarity in opposition of capitalist globalization from above. He says that this computer mediated movements are different from the older party-based communist and socialist movements. He says that these movements are overcoming older identity-based politics. This idea of oppositional politics is espoused by Ayres (1999), who says that international movements are not a new idea, but rather that what is new is that the contention that is taking place against globalization of the world economy.

Many of the academic studies of these movements refer to the use of the internet by the Zapatista movements. Additionally there are studies of the Anti-MAI (Multi-lateral Agreement on Investment by the OECD- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) movements as well as the ‘Battle in Seattle’.

Since this paper is aimed at analyzing the most recent ‘Arab Spring’ and ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movements. The next section will be aimed at summarizing the above sections before the analysis.

Characteristics for Analysis

Using the literature reviewed three main themes was formed, with each theme having several characteristics to be evaluated in order to understand its genesis (or re-genesis), continuation and possible outcome. The following are the three identified themes with the characteristics which will be evaluated. (However in some instances not all characteristics will be evaluated due to lack of information)

Communications: The social movements depend on internet-based communications such as e-mail, e-mail lists, social networks which facilitate communication, informative websites with audio visual presentations, blogging and micro-blogging. Under this theme the following characteristics will be evaluated in a qualitative manner in order to arrive at a conclusion on the movement’s dependency on the internet for its communications.

- Use of the internet
- Aspects of use
- Aims and Information reach
Democratic-ness: A claim of the internet despite its noted low penetration level is that it is inclusive of diverse perspectives and ideologies. Information about the group’s demands and its participants along with final outcomes of the protest will be evaluated to arrive at a conclusion as to the movements participatory nature.

- Inclusivity
- Demands
- Outcomes
- State/target reaction

Nature of community: Another claim of internet ‘enhanced’ social movements which have characteristics overlapping with the above two themes would be what can be called ‘size of community’. This is not the number of participants but rather a focused approach at looking at the movement’s global reach. In addition to looking at the global reach, the length of campaign will be analyzed to find out how much of a sustaining power is available to the movement. Also the co-ordination factor (time frame of specific activities taking place in the overall campaign) will be evaluated to ascertain how well connected the separate movements are.

- Size of community (cities and reach)
- Length of campaign
- Simultaneity

Analysis of contemporary movements

Existing Analysis - Battle in Seattle

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<td>Demands</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>State/target reaction</td>
<td>In Seattle over 600 protestors were arrested, and there were incidents of tear-gassing and pepper spray. Use of force was therefore present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of community</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Size of community (cities and reach)

Eighty two other cities globally, including twenty seven in the US, and fifteen in the global ‘south’. (Bennet, 2003a) - High

### Length of campaign

Beginning 18 June 1999 with the ‘carnival’ continued to grow, with the activist network growing from 1 outlet to 100 in the next three years (Bennet, 2003a) - Long

### Simultaneity

Simultaneous protest in many other cities. - High

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**Comparatively localized - Arab Spring**

Data is mostly anecdotal, and drawn from the authors exposure to the news as well as non-academic sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Characteristic</th>
<th>Comments/Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Communications**                 | **Use of the internet**  
Locally high. Audio visual communication to the world. “We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world”

**Aspects of use**  
It was not used to co-ordinate on a global scale, but resulted in what can be called a spill-over effect with the international media picking up blog feeds and video clips. The success stories would have also encouraged the other movements regionally.

**Aims and Information reach**  
Each movement had its own aims in each country. Mostly targeted at corrupt government practices and demand for better opportunities for the citizens.

**Democratic-ness**

**Inclusivity**  
In Egypt, the protests were participated by all without separation by religion or other ideology. Some branches of the government also participated. In Libya except for the tribe of the ruler, all others joined. Inclusivity therefore varied by country

**Demands**

Varied.

**Outcomes**

Varied. Tunisia has progressed to elections. Egypt is attempting to democratize. Libya has finished a civil war. Other countries have seen rulers doing drastic changes to satisfy demands, often assumed to be in fear of repeating the events in neighboring countries.

**State/target reaction**

Varied. Tunisia was the most non-violent. Egypt despite initial resistance from the state, the protestor demands was met. Libyan government responded with extreme violence.

**Nature of community**

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Bottom up Globalization: How The Internet Empowers Social Movements
Anushke Gunaratne

Size of community (cities and reach) | All cities within each of the countries involved in the Arab Spring engaged in simultaneous protest. However there was no international co-ordination among the movements despite each drawing inspiration from others. Therefore size would be all inclusive on a local level and large on a regional level.

Length of campaign | Ongoing. Libya entered a protracted civil war, and the opposition was supported by foreign military forces. Tunisia went for elections, and Egypt is struggling to democratize the government after their regime change. - Long

Simultaneity | The revolutions took place in order: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya (regime changes), uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, and protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Oman. However the movements were localized against governments. And were not simultaneous on a global scale. – Low
However the movements within each country were well coordinated in most instances, therefore on a local level simultaneity is extremely high

Considering the findings under the framework, I would like to draw the conclusion that using the blanket statement ‘Arab Spring’ to consider it a single movement is a misnomer. Arab Spring can be instead classified as a phenomenon, where the populations of countries within the Arab region drew inspiration from each other to engage in the civil movements with different outcomes.

The Arab Spring therefore does not qualify as a globalized movement against a globalized phenomenon such as that of the ‘Battle in Seattle’ or ‘Occupy Wall Street’.

Ongoing or Emergent movement - Occupy Wall Street (Occupy Movement)

Information was gathered from the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) web site and information search on the postings were limited only for the month of December 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Characteristic</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the internet</td>
<td>The OWS is uses all available internet technologies such as email, lists, ‘tweeting’, blogging, podcasting – Extremely high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspects of use</td>
<td>Wide usage in organizing, communication, growth and outreach. Innovations such the ‘people amp’ – using personal stereo systems as a public announcement system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims and Information reach</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3 [http://occupywallst.org/](http://occupywallst.org/)
4 [http://occupywallst.org/article/d17-reoccupy-schedule/](http://occupywallst.org/article/d17-reoccupy-schedule/)
OWS claims that it uses the revolutionary tactics of the Arab Spring, and contains links to other sites which have resources and information regarding the tactics that should be used in an occupy movement. The movement clearly uses physical occupation as a method to draw attention to the power of the people.

**Discussion**

Both the ‘Battle in Seattle’ and the OWS have much in common. Especially considering the aims of both movements they are connected with the neo-liberal economic decisions which

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6 [http://occupywallst.org/](http://occupywallst.org/)

are part of global capitalism. While the former was opposition to the policy decisions being taken which might affect the interests of the participant groups, OWS seems to be more personal where token physical occupation of spaces which have been lost to the public. OWS is a reaction to the personal hardships of its members. Both movements are geared towards opposing what can be called ‘top-down globalization’, the globalization or spreading of values dominated by neo-liberal economics.

In contrast the Arab Spring is much more localized. Its use of internet as a medium allowed others with similar interests to absorb ideas and engage in similar action. This is evidenced by the OWS referring to Arab Spring, even though in terms of aims they are very dissimilar.

Both OWS and Battle in Seattle use the internet as a medium to focus public opinion and organize action, while Arab Spring may not have consciously used it for its aims. Instead Arab Spring using the internet as a local communication medium, garnered international support as a spill-over effect due to the international audience of the medium they were using.

During the course of gathering data and analyzing a possible new research idea also came into light. Who coined the term ‘Arab Spring’? This will be an interesting idea to be pursued where it is possible that each revolution which took place was strictly a local event, and only drew inspiration. If so the term ‘Arab Spring’ to describe the different revolutions in a general term would be a grave injustice to the local knowledge and symbolism attached to it. Clearly the protest was not against a global force but rather against a local form of oppression. The movements were not coordinated through the internet on a global scale, but coordinated on a local level. Therefore further research in this area might be needed to identify and clearly categorize ‘Arab Spring’ as a phenomenon of a collection of local revolutions.

On a more positive note there is much evidence of governments leveraging the power of the internet in creating space for more direct participatory democracy. As Deibert (2004) concludes the question of whether to include these movements in democracy is already moot. The question therefore for most governments should be how to include?

As discussed earlier governments can regulate the internet through restricting access, or making decisions about the availability and use of access infrastructure. Since internet as a technology cannot be easily put away unless a country decides to isolate itself, it would seem the best course for governments to accept it and leverage its power to increase democratic capabilities. However it will be bad news for authoritarian regimes, as the internet will enable citizens to have access to information and engage in organizing activities. Such oppressive regimes will have to engage in internet monitoring activities or other oppressive practices.

Conclusion

The movements termed as Arab Spring can be termed successful; however those movements were against local problems, and were global only in terms of the audience. The OWS like its predecessor Battle in Seattle are opposing a global phenomenon. Even though the tactics of OWS are similar to Arab Spring, it is likely to be like Battle in Seattle. It will in all likelihood be a long drawn campaign, with little or no change in the global corporations which is
their target.

However due to the power of such movements when engaged in civil action, governments are taking notice, which means that the public opinion will be better represented. The highly organized nature of organizations allowed them to be more influential when the government was engaged in regulation making. The internet is now giving similar organization capabilities to the people, thereby allowing them to influence regulation and governance. But it might be counter-productive in the global south, where lack of internet infrastructure will prevent organization at that level, thereby leaving those countries vulnerable to the influence of the organized organizations.

Finally internet activism by itself will not be sufficient. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the personal knowledge and contact is necessary, along with the final outburst of taking to the streets, without which a revolution will not be a revolution. However the internet can be a catalyst and a tool to facilitate the changes in public opinion every step of the way. Therefore the information must flow.

Sources


