Chapter 1
The Pamphlet Meets API
An Overview of Social Movements in the Age of Digital Media

Emily Stacey
Swansea University, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores traditional social movement theory and attempts to modernize and explain contemporary movements with consideration of the digital tools being utilized by citizens on the ground. The ability to transcend borders and traditional boundaries using digital media, to facilitate international participation and develop communication, and the dissemination of information and coordination among activist networks around the world is hugely important. This chapter asserts that modern contentious collective actions and contemporary movements have received an infusion of autonomy and grassroots energy fueled by the internet, digital technologies, and social networking platforms using Applied Programming Interface (API). Arab Spring movements in Egypt and Tunisia illustrate the use of social media within this emergent framework.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the recent literature in what is identified as two thematic areas (Social Movement Theory, Networked Mobilization) and the case study highlighted in The Arab Spring and Social Media section. This review provides a survey of the key literature in the field of social media, and also cognate areas are relevant to the thesis that digital technologies have changed what it means to conduct political protest (tactics, mobilization, participation). Only theorists crucial to constructing new theory are highlighted. Therefore, this is not meant to be a comprehensive review (For useful additional summaries of the literature see Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Lovink, 2012; Etling, Faris & Palfrey, 2010; Howard, Hussain & Agarwal, 2010; Hussain & Howard, 2012).

This chapter explores scholarly work in social media in relation to claims that political and social dynamics have shifted with the introduction of new modes of communication. While it is clear that social networking sites (SNS), such as Twitter, Facebook and their international equivalents accompanied
with mobile technologies deliver real-time streaming communication (see Berry, 2011; Murthy, 2012), there is some controversy as to how this plays out in particular contexts, political practice and activist organizations (see Morozov, 2009; Tilly, 1978, 2004). Strong claims are sometimes made about the potential for these technologies to facilitate citizen mobilization during politically advantageous events (Castells, 2009, 2012; Murthy, 2012). These claims vary from the technologically realistic viewpoint of Morozov (2009, 2011), Shanti and Boas (2003) and Wu (2011) to the more hopeful analysis of Castells (2009, 2012), and MacKinnon (2012). This chapter situates itself among the more deterministic side of technology, and more specifically, of social networking technologies. While it is understood and articulated throughout the chapter that technologies on their own are value-neutral agents, they have immense potential for social and political change when used by protest actors. Clearly, the social sciences and political science in particular must increasingly take into consideration new technologies and social networking technologies and their function in society. Indeed, these technologies are now so engrained in the fabric of everyday life that they are highly susceptible to being overlooked as individual actors in major international occurrences (see Berry, 2012). This is not to advocate that technologies are agents of change on their own, but it is worth noting that social networking technologies when used efficiently have proven that they can contribute to the coordination of mass dissent and production of (at least) short-term political change (Egypt, Tunisia, Iceland). However, it is imperative that simple notions of technological determinism are avoided. In this study, the assemblage of technical systems, made up of human and non-human actors with differing and contradictory forces and tendencies is carefully mapped in specific contexts.

The following chapter dissects traditional social movement theory and addresses the digital technologies that are dominating protest networks, discusses contemporary cases of networked movements, and looks specifically at the Arab Spring movements in Tunisia and Egypt.

BACKGROUND

Many contemporary political scientists and social movement theorists have recognized the significant transition in the communicative process and organizational aspects of collective action (i.e.: social movements) brought about by globalization and the rise of digital technologies (Castells, 2009, 2012; Tilly, 2003; Klandermans, et al., 2013). Yet there remains a disconnect between the research conducted focusing on new technologies and instances of protest movements or revolutions in identifying these contemporary events, how they are organized using online tactics, and how then, these movements are able to transcend the confinements of the online and move action to the streets. The characteristics that define both social and political movements do not adequately describe new activist network organizations, and more specifically, do not characterize the movements of the Arab Spring. While we have new jargon such as “networked social movement” (Castells, 2012, p. 3) or “hybrid public space” (Castells, 2012, p. 23). Yet there is a lack of critical analysis detailing the shift in organizational and tactical opportunities as well as the criteria of new social and political movements.

This chapter asserts that modern contentious collective actions and contemporary movements have received an infusion of autonomy and grassroots energy fueled by digital technologies and social networking platforms using Applied Programming Interface (API). Applied Programming Interface is essentially a set of rules that govern how one application will and can communicate with another. This can be seen in basic examples such as synching your Google calendar from your cellphone to your computer. API also
Related Content

E-Democracy from the Perspective of Local Elected Members
[www.igi-global.com/article/democracy-perspective-local-elected-members/2053?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/democracy-perspective-local-elected-members/2053?camid=4v1a)

Anti-Corruption Capabilities of Public E-Procurement Technologies: Principal-Agent Theory
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/anti-corruption-capabilities-of-public-e-procurement-technologies/96696?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/anti-corruption-capabilities-of-public-e-procurement-technologies/96696?camid=4v1a)

Lessons on Measuring e-Government Satisfaction: An Experience from Surveying Government Agencies in the UK
[www.igi-global.com/article/lessons-on-measuring-e-government-satisfaction/120258?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/lessons-on-measuring-e-government-satisfaction/120258?camid=4v1a)

Method and Tools to Support Stakeholder Engagement in Policy Development: The OCOPOMO Project
[www.igi-global.com/article/method-tools-support-stakeholder-engagement/70078?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/method-tools-support-stakeholder-engagement/70078?camid=4v1a)