Chapter 12
Social Media and Democracy

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ABSTRACT

Information Technology is an unseparated part of human life. In other words, now, human kind could not continue his life without any technology access. Digital media is well known as a great technology nowadays. Among all facilities which are provided by digital technology, internet could be recognized as the best way through which human ideas could be shared reciprocally. Social networks as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, LinkedIn and several other networks are providing best ways through which ideas could be transmitted. Across this transmission, a phenomenon is growing up and this one could be named as “social media democracy”. Social media could be a great exercise to reach a democratic society and tolerate other ideas. By laminating sections of this article, a short history of internet and more particularly social networks will be dedicated, also the role of this networks on democracy and toleration of other ideas will be presented.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is an unseparated part of human life. In other words, now, humankind could not continue life without any access to technology. Digital media is well known as a great technology nowadays. Among all facilities which are provided by digital technology, the Internet could be recognized as the best way through which human ideas could be shared reciprocally.

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, Linkedin and several other networks are providing the best channels. Through them many ideas can be transmitted. Across this transmission, a phenomenon is growing up and this one could be named as “social media democracy”. Social media could be a great exercise to reach a democratic society and tolerate other ideas.

By laminating sections of this article, a short history of Internet and more particularly social networks will be dedicated, and also the role of this networks on democracy and toleration of other ideas will be presented.

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DIGITAL MEDIA DEMOCRATIC AND DICTATORIAL OPPORTUNITIES

As the history of technology indicates, the birth point of the Internet is 1960s. As the institute of peace in its study under the title “The Impact of New Media in Peacebuilding and Conflict Management” presented the statistics for 1980, only a couple of hundred computers were networked (Endowment of United States Institute of Peace, 2011). As this continues, by 2010 nearly 2 billion computers were connected.

By increasing the number of Internet users, little by little, as Marshall McLuhan predicted in his own theory of the “global village,” new human relationships were established. New jobs, new economic opportunities and new political debates were configured. By creation of social networks on virtual space, providing debate facilities for social discussions, the global village would look like the real world.

Dana & Ellison (2007), through their essay titled “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, And Scholarship,” defined social networks as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to 1) construct public or semi-public profile within bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Dana & Ellison, 2007).

As the above article mentioned, 1997 is recognized as the launch date of the first social network on Internet under the domain sixdegrees.com. After 20 years, there are several web or other facilities which are providing social network services, such as Facebook.com, YouTube.com, Twitter.com, Instagram.com, etc. Each one of world’s countries is trying to launch its own social network, perhaps because the governments want to control their citizens’ information transmission. And this is start point of a phenomenon known as “censorship”. This kind of censorship increases, particularly, when a political movement occurs against governments such as B.F Jackson suggested in his article:

In 2008, activists in Colombia used Facebook to organize marches against the paramilitary organization FARC that drew 10 million participants in Colombia and 2 million more worldwide, and in 2011 thousands of young Nicaraguans used Facebook to protest the re-election bid of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (Jackson, 2014).

When free speech doesn’t have any place in a society, such as that used by social networks, protests occur in diverse ways. B.F. Jackson in his article mentioned that these social networks have a mobilization role and at the same time have a debate forum role for political movements. He divided this censorship into two kinds: internal censorship, which is executed by users, and the second one, external censorship, which is done by government policies.


By considering what Wilson and others report about the role of digital media, a word which indicates a social activity comes in: participation. Participation is used in social sciences. Envisaging this expression without considering the human role is pointless. In other words, humankind is going to participate in social movements especially through digital networks. J. A.G.M Van Dijk through his article under the title “Digital Democracy: Vision and Reality” (Van Dijk, 2012) concluded that: