Discussion: New Media

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For a long time, scholars have been considering the circumstances under which the social movements likely emerge. Since the communication revolution, which came due to the emergence of social media, scholars have directed their attention to questions regarding the impact that social media had on social movements. For transforming the society, social movements have been implemented in many various forms and at various levels. The new studies look at social media as an instrument for shaping the agenda that social movements have and how they aid action at both local and global scale. The most compelling capability of this new tool it empowers ordinary individuals with barely any cost to link and organize themselves. Websites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other blogs have given a voice to individuals who otherwise could not be heard.

Arab Spring inspired this new wave of assertion, which spread across the world quickly. The main force of social media plays a significant role in aiding popular movements in the present decade. (Structure, 2014)The development and advancement of 19th and 20th century communication and transportation system enhanced the interconnectedness among the people regardless of the distance between them. More interconnectedness amongst the societies means more deep patterns of joint activity. The possibility of interconnectedness between the societies increased by expanding the access to communication and transportation system, as well its speed. Though both were important in increasing the connectivity among various societies, but the evolution of communication technology took hold more quickly.

In 1840s with the invention of telegraph, rather than the horses galloping, the messages travelled with the speed of shifting electrons. Basic transmission only took minutes now, which previously was a matter of hours and minutes, however, for anyone who did not have telegraph at site, it took more time. Initially telegraphs were limited and were only available to government offices, business firms or to rich members of society. In 1860s and 1870s the public got access to telegraph because newspapers had expanded their telegraphic services to get stories from locals. Development of radio and television, in 1920s and 1950s respectively, into a tool of mass media signified that the information travelling in the form of audio and video signals with the speed of sound was spreading to a larger number of audiences. (Peterson, 2008) In industrial countries, with the development of these two, government soon lowered the cost to encourage the public to buy radio and TV sets. The first telephone service emerged after the end of the First World War in late 19th century. Though phone service was expensive. After 1990 realized the importance of expanding phone service for enhancing economic activity. Users became more connected with the invention of cell phones, without the need to build a wire network across the nation.

The ability of people to communicate back and forth simultaneously began to develop in 1990s with the emergence of the Internet, which made rapid communication among large number of users possible. The people could now interact with each other, to larger organizations and in some cases even with the governmental agencies and thus the older patterns of one-way communication came to an end, as the pattern of participation became multidirectional.

The speed of travelled increased with the development of steam engines in the 19th century. The opening of Panama Canal in 1915 meant shortened travel between east coast of North America to West coast of South America or between the East cost of North America to Asia. With the construction of Highway in 1920s and 1930s motor vehicles became a feasible means of travelling long distances. The development of aviation in 20th century increased the speed of transportation. Aviation does for travel what internet did for communication.

Media became a significant resource political activism. The invention of telegraph made it possible to transmit news across continents. The global news agency started covering far flung events. And then capturing visuals became possible with the development of newsreels and photography. For instance, in India, Gandhi’s civil disobedience movement dominated the newspapers and in 1930 the Time Magazine named him as “Man of the Year” and more than 500 articles were published which mentioned him. (Scalmer, 2018)

Since past two decades communication revolution is taking place and the organizers of social movements have incorporated these various tools of communication in all their activity. With internet, through web pages, mailing lists, online petitions, have accelerated communication and because of this easy interconnectedness different social groups came on objective of one common agenda. Through radio, television and later internet, social movements became more transparent, increased the capacity to mobilize more people and because of its wide spread the impact of social movements became broader. Two examples of social movements which were triggered by social media are “Twitter Revolution” in Iran in 2009 and “Facebook Revolution” in Egypt in 2011. Social media is opening venues for oppressed people and increase larges scale people to people interaction.

The African Americans began using printed word as a tool of political protest in 1827. Before the beginning of Civil War, newspapers became a vigorous source of antislavery movement in the North, while after Civil War came to an end, black newspaper helped to develop a close-knitted community of formerly enslaved African Americans in both the North and South. The black newspaper took up the cover of political activism, when racist violence began against African Americans. A group of African American New Yorkers pooled their resources and found black press in 1827, called Freedom’s Journal. Two dozen black owned newspaper began operating between 1827 to 1861, which were founded in Northern cities. (Jr., 1999)

After liberation from slavery in post-Civil War era, a new wave of black newspapers sparked, but this time they had wholly new motives to exist. Before emancipation of slavery, the black press could neither publish nor circulate in slave states of the South. African Americans under slavery were forbidden from learning to read. After having access to education, newspapers became a sign of freedom for African Americans, as a source to stay informed about their people. During the Reconstruction Era, the black press devoted itself to build communities of free black men and women residing in North and South. In 1876, after President Hayes removed the protections for black slaves a new wave of violence unleashed against African Americans. The white press of South failed to chide the racist violence rather it encouraged the mobs. As a result, black reporter made public records of crimes against African Americans to notify the black community.

Ida B. Wells, an unsung heroine in American history, was African American teacher, a journalist, and a civil rights activist. With all the fearlessness, she investigated and reported the lynching of black people in America, in a manner never done before. At the age of 21, while travelling in a bus she clashed with the conductor who ordered her to move to a section allocated for black passengers. On her refusal, the conductor forced to move her but she “fastened her teeth on back of his hand”. By 25, Wells co-owned “Free Speech and Headlight”, that was a local black newspaper. As an editor as well, she used this platform to report racial disparity. She spent months travelling across South of country and research about more than 700 cases of lynching. She visited places where people were tortured, beaten to death, burned alive and examined the victim’s photos, took statements from eyewitnesses and in some cases hired private investigators too. She was a courageous woman in an era of segregation, in a time when women didn’t have the right to vote.

One of the most highlighted work that Wells did was the destruction of narrative built by white media that lynching victims were criminals, often labelled as those who rape white women. “Her reporting showed that rape had not been alleged in two thirds of the lynching’s or was only alleged after a covert, consensual, interracial relationship had been exposed”. (Smith, 2018) She was the first person to tally the number of the lynched victims. Wells who was perceived too radical, worked as suffrage activist with Susan B Anthony. She founded National Association of Coloured Women’s Club, which dealt the matters regarding civil rights and women suffrage.

The editor of Memphis Free Speech, Ida B. Wells, travelled across the South and reported lynching of black men and women. Wells realized that her life was under threat when a white mob attacked her press office as a result she moved to North and progressed her career as New York Age writer. As technology evolved at the beginning of the 20th century, population of Black began moving to California, this resulted in troublesome deviations in white lifestyle and a harsh white reaction. Many economic problems were faced by South. Sale of Black newspapers were banned by Southern businesses, realizing what great impact they had.

Black press went through enormous changes in post-war era. In the late 1940s, the black newspaper laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights movements and their utmost accomplishment during this period was obdurate political activism. The end of World War II didn’t mean an end of government’s persecution of black press, rather government agencies still targets black newspapers. The black press covered events across the country as the Civil Rights Movement developed. Reporters wrote about their personal experiences of how they were refused the services at lunch counters.

#idabwells Despite facing life danger, Wells became a true warrior for African Americans, an enduring force against anti-lynching, and now is honoured with a driveway in Chicago named after her.

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