

Social Media, A Tool for Democracy or Domination

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Abstract

The advancement of technology, like anything else that may affect people's lives widely, is like a double-edged sword. It is difficult to conclude that something like the Internet, which is more specifically related to various "Social Media" in everyday life of people, has enriched the way to achieve democracy, or is itself a powerful and invincible tool in the hands of the owners of technologies to dominate people and predict social movements, or to push public opinion towards a specific goal. By examining different examples, it can be seen that collecting and analyzing information has been an important part of controlling a country or region since ancient times. dealing with this powerful tool that collects and monitors the main value of the network society that we live in, which is information, can be different in a different context. pathology of this tool is needed and maybe it is important to think about the world that we created in 20 century and the possible necessity of interpreting it again.

Introduction

Technology, which has been defined by the oxford dictionary as “scientific knowledge used in practical ways in the industry” by the opinion of Many experts “is neither inherently helpful nor harmful. It is simply a tool” (Anderson, et al., 2020). It's a double-edged sword that gathers advantages and disadvantages together. Due to the increasing growth of information technology in recent decades and the emergence of all kinds of virtual spaces for sharing visual, audial, textual information, etc., the phenomenon which is called social media plays a prominent role in sharing and analyzing people’s opinions. Although social media is no longer new like the early days, in 2022, more than 5 billion people worldwide are internet users and 4.65 billion of them are on social media. (Anon., 2022). Today, a wide range of activities, such as following news, discussing political and social issues, organizing and participating in civic activities, etc., are followed through social media. The enormous power of social media has challenged the traditional authority of modern nation-states. The necessity of interests can lead the world's popular and prominent social networks to covertly spread fake news, misinformation, or intentional advertising according to their goals. This power allows senior social media managers to change public opinion and even the results of major events such as elections. The technology companies in charge of these platforms have a lot of power to influence their network within the realm of media. In other words, they can manipulate, limit or control what users share. In this regard, it is important to investigate whether social media as a globalized tool works to create a worldwide democracy or to dominate and control people more easily. the debate here is about the role of social media as the tool of the network society, which uses the information provided by different virtual platforms to gather and analyze people’s opinions on different subjects. it is important to understand that the results of this process will undergo the making of plans to provide better and more beneficial routes for society or to create innovation to pre-controlling of people's minds and social movements.

Information, the New Value

The definition of "information" In Merriam webster's dictionary is "knowledge obtained from investigation, study, or instruction". Information has a special nature as a resource and a commodity, and its utility, when combined with its other values, is so prevalent that the future historical era is now commonly referred to as "the information age." (Kent, 1977). Over the last two decades, information has spread into everyone's daily life and has become a regular commercial and cultural good. Information as a concept has gained new significance and worth. Information has come to be seen as the hallmark of the modern world, and various theorists have debated the idea that our modern world is an information society. (Weller, 2010, p. 1). Information, instead of money, is the real value in the age we live, the age of Network Society. As Manuel Castells states we have crossed the information age and we have entered the Network Society. "The Information Technology Revolution did not create the network society; But without Information Technology, the Network Society would not exist. (Castells, 2007, p. 7).

The Network Society

Today Society is a Network Society; A network-based social structure is an open, highly dynamic system that is susceptible to change without jeopardizing its equilibrium. The network society is currently capitalist in all of its institutional manifestations. Information is the capital in it. Through these networks, "capital" is invested in various types of activity, including trade, tourism, culture, etc., but some of these activities are more lucrative than others. The money invested in these activities flows back into the meta-network of financial flows, where all capital is equalized in the commodified democracy of profit-making, regardless of how much profit was extracted. The capitalists are most definitely not the legitimate owners of the means of production under these new technological, organizational, and economic circumstances. Some of the key players in this system are managers, traditional bankers, multinational managers, public businesses, and so on. There is no such thing as a global capitalist class, sociologically or economically; money laundering from various criminal enterprises flows to this mother of all accumulations, which is the global financial network. The movements and unpredictable logic of a global, linked network of capital, however, ultimately decide economies and shape societies. The financial flows are controlled by faceless technological networks. Since "networkers" require more independence when doing tasks, the Network Society promotes greater freedom at work. As a result, labor loses its community essence as it

gets increasingly personalized. As the most powerful economic actors currently, networks shape society more than people or organizations, such as social classes or business owners. Businesses, the media, politics, society, and other institutions are all impacted by "networking logic." Nowadays, cultural expressions are largely disseminated through electronic networks that include the audience in a variety of codes and values before being digitized and incorporated into an audiovisual hypertext, decoupling them from history and location. Since a diverse, all-encompassing media system is the primary conduit for information and communication, politics is increasingly played out in the media. However, the structural significance is absorbed by the meta-hidden network's logic, where value is formed, cultural codes are developed, and power is determined. Most people now perceive the network society, the new social order, as an inconvenience meta-social. In this system Value instead of money is information and its tool is media. Media (As a Tool) gather Information (as Value) to use in negative and positive aspects. (Castells, 2009, p. 502).

Communication Technology Changes

Not all that long ago houses had just the basic communication types of equipment including the phone line and radio up to the time that television, the first source of entertainment and information, became the most widely used component of communication technology in the mid-20th. In the following years, CDs and cassette tapes, and game consoles became available to everyone, therefore, communication technologies expanded and got more individualized. with the spread of wireless, the Internet became the main driving force behind buying a computer. Now, the Internet is a commonplace aspect of daily life that influences learning, living, playing, and interpersonal communication (Watkins, 2009, p. 4). The engineers who created the core technologies or businessmen who benefited from them cannot explain the rise of computer networks as platforms for popular culture and public life, despite the social internet's ubiquity. However, it can be said that millions of hobbyists, volunteers, activists, and entrepreneurs who hosted small-scale online systems in cities for fifteen years before the internet's launch served as its early pioneers (Driscoll, 2022, p. 3). Internet in its short history of it has become an inseparable part of everyday life. Today life in every aspect is attached to the internet from buying things online to applying for university or work, official works like banking, etc. Internet means something different depending on who, when, and where you are. (Driscoll, 2022, p. 4).

Social Media, Social Changes

As social and mobile media lives become more commonplace and more daily, there will inevitably be increased discussion about their effects on behavior and society. The social changes brought about by technological advancements represent humans' insatiable need for new, better ways of life, which frequently entail modifying or even giving up more traditional ways of living. Social networking sites like Twitter allow users to follow one another all day. A "tweet" is a brief message or status update that users publish to their Twitter account to express their opinions or to respond to an important event (Watkins, 2009, p. 48). Television and social network sites represent two fundamentally different kinds of mediated experiences. Whereas television is about watching and consuming, social-network sites are primarily about doing and sharing. "The cultural history of file sharing is imbricated with the technological history of communication by modem. For example, the same piece of software that would have taken several hours to download with a modem in 1980 took only a few minutes in 1990" (Driscoll, 2022, p. 95). Despite all the huge discussions about social media's effects on our lives, it could not change one of the strongest social ties, Similarity; People get attracted to online communities which have the most noticeable qualities such as age, education, economic or social class, and so on (Watkins, 2009, p. 97).

Today's social media functions are not like before; in fact, they are more like some semi-joint proprietary platforms that might change at a moment's notice, and in parallel users have few options, platforms avoid responsibility, and states are reluctant to step in and the idea that social media is to blame for all of our issues has spread such as social media is depressing us and making us dull, ignorant, and intolerant however people aren't the problem, it is the platforms. Nevertheless, the term "social media" was developed not by Silicon Valley but by People who use the internet to socialize every day. Networked computers have frequently been modified by users to facilitate interpersonal interactions. For instance, The Source and CompuServe in the 1980s supplied vast amounts of news and financial data, but users spent all of their time chatting with one another in chat rooms and forums because being in connection with other people is a basic need of human beings (Driscoll, 2022, p. 195) but also social media's roles and influences are directly inversely correlated, therefore by optimizing roles, the influences will also rise (Segumpan & Abu Zahari, 2022, p. 125). People's intrinsic ability to produce shareable content for a variety of networks is facilitated by the rising role of social media as a marketing platform (Segumpan & Abu Zahari, 2022, p. 114).

The generation of today is urged to "share," not just one's politics and private life, but also one's preferences, skills, and abilities (Herbert & Fisher-Høyrem, 2021, p. 57). The utilization of social media has enormous influence in numerous business sectors (Segumpan & Abu Zahari, 2022, p. 113). Due to the variety of ways that social media may be used to reach audiences, multinational corporations recognize Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Snap Chat, and Reddit as marketing tools (Segumpan & Abu Zahari, 2022, p. 115).

The business social media platforms are relatively recent for example Around 2005, Facebook was founded, and its business was about the exploitation of personal data for advertising purposes which it's the same up to now. Platform providers were successful in increasing access to the internet world through innovative interface design, however, did not result in fair or long-lasting business structures (Driscoll, 2022, p. 196). Commercial social media companies like Facebook present themselves in public discourse as "tech" companies rather than "media" publishers. This enables them to disclaim responsibility for the actions of users on their platform and gives them the right to impose arbitrary "Terms of Service" agreements to control how users behave. Users -who depend on these networks for social interaction and employment opportunities- just scroll through the confusing "Terms of Service" and confirm them without a clear understanding or a chance to change them. These illiberal, private areas pose as public squares platforms denying any responsibility for their users, they yet market themselves as communities where people may congregate and discuss the most private aspects of their lives (Driscoll, 2022, p. 197). Posts and profiles on social media are meaningful because they are the expressive products of users who put themselves on display (Herbert & Fisher-Høyrem, 2021, p. 22).

Social media influencers are a beneficial tool for businesses, particularly in how to enhance their relationship with their clients. They have a direct impact on consumer attitudes and brand perception (Segumpan & Abu Zahari, 2022, p. 194). The three most recognizable platforms for marketing are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter which appeal to event marketers can be due to several elements, including their wide audience coverage, accessibility, good interaction, simplicity, free use, efficiency, and so forth. These facts reveal that those variables can show the degree of social media influence on marketing events. (Segumpan & Abu Zahari, 2022, p. 176). while Twitter is being used by a vast community including those who are active in the business LinkedIn plays a more major role in connecting entrepreneurs to specialists and etc.

while social media is assumed potential for traditional social structures to change, pieces of evidence show that some social clusters take values by likes, comments, mentions, and so on. in parallel the ones who know the ways of being seen in this space, make a new hierarchy and social order (Herbert & Fisher-Høyrem, 2021, p. 49). Social media has recently gained popularity as a news source across the globe however on social media the news is not only disseminated by multiple posts but also by Paratexts that are posted alongside them.

To spread or shape public opinion among a newly emerging internet user audience, social media groups employ memes (Pesce & Noto, 2016). Memes are a common form of expression nowadays that, through moving across the internet, help give a news article or special event a new perspective (Herbert & Fisher-Høyrem, 2021, p. 52). to explain the works of memes better the function of genes can be considered; As biological properties transfer from one to another by Genes the same duty and process is defined for Memes. Richard Dawkins, the scientist who explained the function of Genes for the first time, proposed the idea of Memes either. Those who believe in this theory would be able to consider another element that plays a major role in the way which the heritage of new generations is made up of. The fact that memetic transformation is much easier than genetic transformation let the cultural ideas and behaviors get viral in an extraordinary faster way. People need nothing more than a smartphone to be hosted for a memetic transformation. Many years before, when there was no plane or train, the world was not susceptible to seeing a pandemic biological phenomenon, whether a harmful disease or a noble cure. The development of transformation facilities provided a chance for both to get through the pandemic. The story of the development of social media is the same: cyber connections provided a chance for the memetic transformation of good and bad ideas and behaviors in a fast way. This led us to know why a wide variety of images that contain a specific story are called memes too. Each member of the society is an infinite source of data that supplies this information consistently using information tools, the most significant of which are virtual spaces, in the year 2022, as we leave the information age and enter the era of the networked society. People exchange information and ideas continuously. All of this data is gathered and processed in the metaverse, which either directly or indirectly determines the future. The immense amount of information shared in the virtual world has the potential to increase freedom, awareness, and growth while also having the potential to dominate society by eavesdropping on people's thoughts and planting predetermined ideas in their heads.

Value of Information for Governments

In all previous ages and up to the present, gathering information from numerous events around the country and its neighbors and classifying and analyzing them has been one of the crucial requirements for stable governance. Since the founding of the first governments, this enduring bond has grown larger, deeper, and more significant over time, most notably in the modern era and with the development of technology. Data has always been collected by governments, though on a massively smaller scale and intensity than today's everyday forms of corporate data collection (Herbert & Fisher-Høyrem, 2021, p. 14). The point of data gathering is not just to gather data, but to continuously manage behavior through data uses. (Herbert & Fisher-Høyrem, 2021, p. 14). The ways people interact with the public information domain and, consequently, are influenced by it, have been significantly changed by rapidly developing information communications technology and increased connection to online sources. By combining tech-enabled formats of persuading content, automated distribution, and audience involvement in content propagation, a cunning propagandist can obtain improved ways of shaping ideas around the globe as populations get more connected. Additionally, the propagandist can boost audience receptivity and influence effects by concealing the sources of propagandistic content through audience involvement on the internet and social networks (Nielson, 2015). In liberal democracies, which are predicated on the idea that citizens' freedom of choice in political matters should inform public decision-making and power structures, such subtle mass manipulation, through and using personal networks, is problematic. (Lippman, 1922; Irwin, 1919; Marlin, 2011). A first understanding of the scope, complexity, and social effects of contemporary persuasive communications, or what can be called "participatory propaganda," has been made possible by extensive research on social network tools, influence strategies, and how these manifests in information consumers online, including their political choices (Herbert & Fisher-Høyrem, 2021, p. 111). According to their potential and capability, virtual networks can significantly alter the political and social landscape. By exchanging information and knowledge, they can interact with leaders and elected officials and close the knowledge gap that exists between the elites and the general population. Information is now regarded as a public good that all citizens should have access to in the digital age. To be more precise, the government must ensure that citizens have access to information since it is a public right. This knowledge is crucial for comprehending the modern social and political context, and appreciating its significance necessitates the active participation of citizens. The emergence of new political expressions has coincided with the growth of the Web, indicating

that the young and the digital are leading the way and therefore that voting, public manifestations of engagement, and collective political activity are all changing. (Watkins, 2009, p. 203). People have discovered cultural, social, economic, political, and other aspects of this social network. On the one hand, they exchange opinions and hashtags to express themselves and put pressure on the government to take their requests seriously. However, some well-known people and "influencers" also find value in social media. These individuals have excellent persuasive and influencing abilities. As an example of how social media works in political issues, the presidential election of the United States when Obama was selected can be brought in. in fact "After hiring top talent from the online world, Obama did something else—he began participating in the online world himself. Obama did not create an online movement, he joined one" (Watkins, 2009, p. 197). Also, Meredith Segal the founder of Students for Barack Obama once stated that "Young people are on the Web. That's how we're organizing". Another case study of how social media, especially YouTube and Facebook, can influence political events in the 2014 elections in Algerian can be studied which ended in convincing the Algerian people to boycott and reject the elections (Segumpan & Abu Zahari, 2022, p. 164). Another fact is that in digital media, politicians may put untrue or fabricated information for their political power. For instance, in the 2016 US presidential election, Donald Trump used Twitter to claim that his opponent Ted Cruz's father, President John F Kennedy's assassination and continued to falsely claim that President Barack Obama was not born in the USA. Moreover, false news stories infiltrated reports by legacy media organizations as they relied heavily on digital sources for information and there is no time and zone limitation. Jim Morrison, the American singer, and songwriter has a famous sentence in this regard which is: whoever controls the media controls the minds.

Rahe Shahi (Roads of King-Ancient Road)

As mentioned before gathering information and analyzing them by governments has a long history back to the creation of the first ancient governments. The Achaemenid government had a very colorful combination from a socio-economic point of view. The provinces of Asia Minor, Elam, Babylon, Syria, Phoenicia, and Egypt, which had their advanced government institutions long before the emergence of the Persian Empire, were part of this government. Following in the footsteps of the mentioned countries that had advanced economies, the Persians defeated the backward tribes of Arabs, Scythians, and other tribes that were in the stage of disintegration of the tribal system. Therefore, when the Persians came up with the administration system for the defeated countries, they faced great difficulties. However, the

Achaemenians achieved great success in organizing the administration of the defeated countries in comparison with the kings of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon who were before them and tried to create favorable conditions for economic growth in these lands. King Cyrus and other Achaemenid kings kept the internal administration of Babylon, Egypt, Asia Minor, and other countries as it was and did not change it and allowed the defeated nations to manage their affairs. But the rebellions of 521 and 522 BC showed that the Achaemenid government was not very strong. To stop the separatist tendencies, Darius I carried out important financial-administrative reforms, which made it possible to establish a stable administrative system of the government and control over the conquered countries, and these reforms also organized the collection of tribute and increased the number of the army. Following these reforms, the administrative structure of various departments was aligned. Darius, I divided the territories under his rule into networks called satrapies, the information from which was collected by the "royal road" and people called "eyes and ears of the king" and brought to the place of government and analyzed (Map1) and were the basis of the king's decisions. The satrapies, whose borders in many cases were the same as the old doublet or ethnic borders, were a collection of twenty satrapies including seventy nations under the Achaemenid rule (Grantovskii, et al., 1359, p. 80) To facilitate the work of the empire and maintain control over this "vast land", Dariush Shah also made progress in building roads, the most important of which was the road that stretched from Sardis to Susa and Persia, which was 2,400 kilometers long, and another road that went from Memphis, Egypt to the northeast. The empire was advancing. On these roads, he also opened guesthouses, stables with fast horses, and military bases. (رضائلی، ۱۳۹۲، p. 138) (Michigan, 1990, p. 167).



Map 1 Rahe Shahi-King's Road - Source: <https://ask98.ir>

Conclusion

with the rise of information technology, people got access to different kinds of facilities to share their information more and more. From being objective in front of the Radio or television to becoming constantly subjective by sharing information on social media, we have gone through a vast and deep change just in a short time. Positively thinking, all these facilities have brought us to achieve a more sustainable society with more justice. but Technology, like all other things, has both bright and dark sides. as it is clear all the governments historically have been using the information gathered from people around the country to govern more efficiently or control people in a faster way, and this concept is not ever changed but became more complicated and deeper. with the fast technological innovations and increasing use of the different platforms for sharing information, ironically, consciously, or unconsciously a more organized, more accurate, and wide organization was created to collect and process and analyze data. this time, not directly by governments, but by persons who under the name of tech companies made platforms for sharing pictures and commenting, and communicating without limitation. from using people's searching to find commercial targets to selling political and sensitive information to predicting the spread of disease based on symptoms searched by people to get more prepared to face it. not only do people get bombarded with thousands of different information daily on different channels but also there are some influencers and bloggers who have taken a huge power in influencing people's decisions by stating their opinions in every aspect such as art, culture, business politic, elections, and so on. The question will be if people can make decisions without the influence of these data that mostly create not always a real picture, or not. another fact is that this tool can work in different geographical zones differently. when in one country people can express their opinions and make government do as they wish by making a tweet trend, in another country it can just result in identifying the protesters to arrest them. another point of view is about the "safety valve" theory. There is a philosophical theory called "Safety Valve" which is the justification of the utility of protest. Under the safety valve rationale, citizens are free to make statements concerning controversial social issues to express their displeasure against the government and its policies. In assuming this right, citizens will be deterred from undertaking violent means to draw attention to their causes. This theory first came into account as a not successful one which was trying to compare a physical truth that steam rises to the top of a boiler and therefore the safety valve must be located at the top, and the world of economics by taking an example of displacement of eastern wage-earners to the west in the United States (Simler, 1958, p. 252). As Simler stated, "No one would contend

that the safety valve worked perfectly, but to argue that because it does not function flawlessly it did not function at all, is a non sequitur". based on this theory, therefore the media can repeatedly get the attention of people on one issue at a time and they start to comment and express their disagreements and sometimes hate, and immediately, by making another subject trend, move people's attention to another thing. accordingly, they release their energy and concentration on issues, and after a time they cannot identify the real vast core problematic matters. needless to say, bloggers and influences can have a crucial role in this game (Simler, 1958, p. 252). Therefore, basically, there are lots of holes that the profiteers can take advantage of them to fulfill their desires and goals. although the internet and specifically social media have brought an easier life for all people in a lot of aspects, it should take into account that in total as a networked society, globally, the distances have noticeably removed between people around the world, and locally, based on the geographical zones, what kind of obstacle exists to be possibly tackled towards making social media a tool for more democracy and less domination. There are two main perspectives on the role of media in democracy. Although some believe that media contributes to democracy, some others think of media as a threat to it. As both have rational arguments and clues about their claims, it seems that the truth is a combination of these two main points of view. Media is neither a survivor nor a destroyer in its essence and its function depends on the provider and the user. There are a bunch of claims about how people can make challenges to the government and vice versa. But that is all about the susceptibility of this tool. This is while the problem usually rises not from the tools themselves but from the person who uses that: The same knife which can be a tool to rescue a person from a tumor can be used to kill an innocent guy. different beliefs and desires result in different outcomes with the same tool. This is how the necessity of ethics shows up again. It is not enough to know that media is a double-edged tool, nor is it enough to know that some restrictions and manipulations in news and etc. are done by governors or capitalists to shape society. Being aware is a necessary but not enough step. Pathology is just a preliminary step to cure. As Zizek, the Slovenian philosopher says: "philosophers have only interpreted the world, it's time to change it!" (Žižek, 2012) But maybe today we should say: that in the 20th century, we might have changed the world too fast and it is the time to interpret it again and start thinking!"

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