

## SOCIAL MEDIA

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### THE NEW COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE

The communication system of the industrial society was based on mass media, largely television, radio and the print press. Such technologies allow for the mass distribution of a one-way message from one-to-many. The widespread diffusion of the Internet, mobile communication, digital media and a variety of social software tools throughout the world has transformed the communication system into interactive horizontal networks that connect the local and global. New forms of social media\*, such as SMS, blogs, social networking sites, podcasts and wikis, cater to the flow of messages from many-to-many. They have provided alternative mediums for citizen communication and participatory journalism.

Social media has been used as a tool to support development outcomes (access to markets, financial services and employment; accountability and transparency; service delivery; and protection of human rights) and to push for social change and transformation. New media should not be seen as socially neutral tools, however. Despite the growth of information and communication technologies in the developing world, in particular mobile phones, some technologies may not be accessible to marginalised groups, which can reinforce inequalities in society.

Further, there has been little comprehensive research or rigorous evaluation of the causal influence of social media. As such, its ability to contribute to development outcomes and social change remains contested. While recent discussion on the political impact of social media has centered on the power of mass protests to topple governments, social media's real potential may lie in supporting civil society and the public sphere.

\* The terms 'social media' and 'information and communication technologies (ICTs)' are often used interchangeably.

**Aday, S. et al., 2010, 'Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics', United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC**

<http://www.usip.org/files/resources/pw65.pdf>

This report explores the effects of new media on contentious politics. It seeks to identify how our understanding of these complex relationships could be improved and how this knowledge could be applied to major policy issues. The report delineates five distinct levels of analysis at which new media may plausibly affect politics and proposes research questions and hypotheses in each area: individual transformation, intergroup relations, collective action, regime policies, and external attention.

**Walton, O., 2010, 'New ICTs for development', Helpdesk Research Report, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=601>

The use of ICTs among poor people is growing rapidly. This short report discusses how new information and communications technologies (ICTs) are being used to enhance development outcomes. First, they have helped to improve poor people's access to markets, financial services and employment. Second, they have helped to improve the provision of services to poor people by governments, the private sector and NGOs, and to make these services more responsive to the needs of poor communities. Third, they have supported improvements in accountability, transparency and participation, by allowing citizens to publicise their concerns and grievances, share ideas, present information and hold governments to account. Fourth, they have contributed to improvements in security and supported efforts to protect human rights. Fifth, ICTs have affected the operational approaches of donors and other development actors. Many of the approaches and tools mentioned in this report are still relatively new, however, and have not been subjected to rigorous evaluation. Very few ICT for Development (ICT4D) activities have proved sustainable. Recent research has stressed the need to shift from a technology-led approach, where the emphasis is on technical innovation towards an approach that emphasises innovative use of already established technology (mobiles, radio, television).

## **SOCIAL MEDIA, THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

The spread of affordable information and communication technologies, such as mobile phones and the internet, has broadened the public sphere; and shifted it from the institutional realm to the new communication space. The global civil society and public sphere now have the means to exist independently from political institutions (Castells, 2008). Social media are used as organizing and mobilizing tools; and as a medium for debate, dialogue and collective decision-making. Non-state actors rely on horizontal networks of communication and mass media to shape debate in the public sphere, influence opinions, and foster social change. Web-based media technologies have allowed for participation in a new type of public sphere that can be difficult for the state to control.

The effectiveness of new media technologies to bring about social change is highly contested. Critics such as Malcolm Gladwell dismiss new media activism as based on weak ties, which can only demand low-risk participation. In the absence of a hierarchical structure, they claim that it is difficult for social media networks to think strategically. Advocates, such as Clay Shirky, argue that ICTs enable citizens to interact and can accelerate cooperation and action. Others argue that it is the creative ways in which people have adapted the technologies, rather than the technologies themselves, that are a force for social change.

There are various factors at play that can contribute to the success or weakness of social media as an infrastructure for dialogue, civic activism, and social movements. These include the presence of some form of effective leadership; the way in which elites respond; and links with traditional mass media and other partners. Regimes can be caught off guard or they can respond by cracking down on communication tools and protestors. In some cases, regimes have learned to use social media to their

benefit. In order to reach and influence public opinion at large, it is considered important to rely on both ICTs and mass media and to link to the broader activist community.

**Castells, M., 2008, 'The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance', The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 616, no. 1, pp. 78-93**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4140>

This article examines the development of a global public sphere (based on global communication networks), and of 'public diplomacy' in this sphere. Globalisation has shifted debate from the national to the global domain, prompting the emergence of a global civil society, of ad hoc forms of global governance, and of a global public sphere. Public diplomacy – the diplomacy of the public, not of the government – intervenes in this global sphere, laying the ground for traditional forms of diplomacy to act beyond the strict negotiation of power relationships by building on shared cultural meaning. The global public sphere could facilitate public debate to inform the emergence of consensual global governance.

**Castells, M., 2007, 'Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society', International Journal of Communication, vol. 1, pp. 238-266**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4125>

How has the relationship between power, the media and politics changed in the context of globalisation, the crisis of political legitimacy and the emergence of new media technologies? What opportunities do these technologies provide for non-traditional actors to set the political agenda? This paper argues that politics and power relations has historically involved a battle over values and ideas played out in the media. The rise of new mass self-communication via new technologies provides opportunities for non-institutional forms of social movements to gain influence. Corporate media and mainstream politics recognise the power of this influence, leading to convergence between traditional and mass self-communication. The battle for power will in future be played out in non-traditional and dynamic forms.

**Hoffmann, B., 2010, 'Civil Society 2.0? – How the Internet Changes State-Society Relations in Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Cuba', GIGA Working Paper no. 156, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Hamburg**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4066>

How has the spread of digital media across international boundaries affected the role of civil society under authoritarian regimes? Examining the case of Cuba, this paper compares civil society dynamics prior to the internet – in the early to mid-1990s – and a decade later. It finds that in the pre-internet period, civil society's focus was on behind-the-scenes struggles for associational autonomy within the state-socialist framework. A decade later, digital media has supported the emergence of a new type of public sphere in which the civil society debate involves autonomous citizen action. However, its effects on political reform depend on the extent to which web-based voices connect with off-line debate and action.

**Garrett, R. K., 2006, 'Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICT's', Information, Communication, and Society, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 202-224**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4132>

New information and communications technologies (ICTs) are changing how activists communicate, collaborate and demonstrate. How can we understand these changes? This paper focuses on three factors: mobilising structures, opportunity structures and framing processes. Activists have devised numerous ways to use new technologies for mobilising, realising new political opportunities, and

shaping the language in which movements are discussed. Situating existing studies within a unifying framework will provide a more coherent overview of the field.

**Haider, H., 2011, 'Social Media and Reform Networks, Protest and Social Movements', Helpdesk Research Report, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham**  
<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=700>

The widespread diffusion of the Internet, mobile communication, digital media and a variety of social software tools throughout the world has transformed the communication system into interactive horizontal networks that connect the local and global. This helpdesk research report looks at the role of social media in the formation and functioning of civic groups, protest and social movements, the effectiveness of social media and success factors. Social media is considered to contribute to democratic processes, and to be an important mechanism for collective action, protests and social movements. While many claims are made about the effectiveness of social media, there is little systematic research that seeks to estimate the causal effects of social media. Various factors discussed in the literature as contributing to the success or weakness of social media include: leadership, links to conventional media and other activists, elite reaction and external attention.

**Gladwell, M. and Shirky, C., 2011, 'From Innovation to Revolution: Do Social Media Make Protests Possible?', Foreign Affairs, March/April**  
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67325/malcolm-gladwell-and-clay-shirky/from-innovation-to-revolution>

## **SOCIAL MEDIA, INFORMATION AND E-GOVERNANCE**

ICTs, in particular mobile phones, are seen as providing avenues for 'e-democracy'. They have been used by politicians to gain support and by politicians and civil society to provide information to the electorate for decision-making. In South Africa, political parties used SMS and social networking to communicate with their supporters ahead of the 2009 elections.

Many donors argue that ICTs can positively impact on government transparency, responsiveness, and accountability and empower citizens by increasing flows of information between government and citizens. Others caution that ICTs are not a panacea – they rely on the political will of organisations to be transparent. Furthermore, ICTs can only bring about improvements in government-citizen communication if citizens have the capacity to access and use them, and some citizens in developing countries still have limited access to ICTs, particularly in remote areas. Recent research, however, is demonstrating how new social media (e.g. mobile phones) can function as an alternative medium for citizen communication or participatory journalism.

**Wasserman, H., 2011, 'Mobile Phones, Popular Media and Everyday African Democracy: Transmissions and Transgressions', Popular Communication, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 146-158**  
<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4138>

Do new media technologies, including mobile phones, facilitate political participation and create social change? Why is there renewed optimism in the potential for mobile phones to facilitate change when the sector is typified by inequalities? This paper explores the analytical frameworks for understanding

the relationship between mobile phones and participatory democracy. It argues that mobile phones can ease communication by facilitating information transmission. Their greater potential, however, lies in their capacity to transgress cultural and social borders by refashioning identities and creating informal economies and communicative networks.

**Sida, 2009, 'ICTs for Democracy: Information and Communication Technologies for the Enhancement of Democracy – with a Focus on Empowerment', Swedish International Development Agency, Stockholm**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3737>

What is the potential of Information and Communication Technology to support processes of democratisation and empowerment in developing countries? This report outlines the theoretical background to discussions on ICTs and democracy, and presents case studies from Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. It argues for raising awareness and understanding of ICTs, and for making ICTs central to development cooperation and support for democratisation in the case study countries.

**Sey, A., and Fellows, M., 2009, 'Literature Review on the Impact of Public Access to Information and Communication Technologies', CIS Working Paper No. 6, University of Washington Center for Information & Society, Seattle**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3726>

What evidence exists on the impacts of shared public access to Information and Communication Technologies? Governments, NGOs and entrepreneurs in developing countries have invested significantly in shared modes of access to ICTs (such as public libraries, telecentres and internet cafés), but to what effect? This review identifies and assesses empirical evidence on: (1) venue performance and sustainability; (2) users; (3) usage patterns; and (4) downstream impacts. Most of the literature evaluates process rather than impact. Solid evidence of impact remains elusive, and the evidence that does exist is mixed.

**Banda, F., Mudhai, O., and Tettey, W., 2009, 'New Media and Democracy in Africa: A Critical Interjection', Introduction in African Media and the Digital Public Sphere, eds. O Mudhai, W Tetty and F Banda, Palgrave Macmillan, New York**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3766>

Has new media technology brought social progress to Africa? This study looks at the impact of new information and communication technologies on the societies and politics of African countries. It argues that, a decade after the introduction of ICTs, the old questions about access, inequality, power and the quality of information available are still valid. The value of new media lies in the extent to which it meshes with old media to provide multimedia platforms that allow for greater democratic participation, inclusion and expression.

### ***E-governance***

E-Governance is government use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective (UNESCO, 2010). Recent research has shown that whilst ICTs are capable of reinforcing participation and democracy at the local level, they can under some circumstances be controlled by, and enhance the power of, local elites.

**Misuraca, G. C., 2007, 'E-Governance in Africa: From Theory to Practice - A Handbook on ICTs for Local Governance', Sections 3 and 4, Africa World Press, New Jersey / International Development Research Centre, Ottawa**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=2919>

What are the implications for policy and practice of the integration of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) in local governance systems in Africa? What are the key drivers for effective integration of ICTs? Using cases from Senegal, Ghana, Uganda and South Africa this book analyses these issues. There is potential for growth by integrating ICTs into local governance, but building capacity is a key aspect of that potential.

**Heeks, R., 2003, 'Causes of E-Government Success and Failure: Design-Reality Gap Model', Institute for Development Policy Management (IDPM), University of Manchester**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=526>

Why do e-Government projects succeed or fail? The eGovernment for the Development Information Exchange project suggests that a key factor is the level of difference between the current reality and the model/conception and assumptions built into the project's design. The larger this design-reality gap, the greater the risk of failure; conversely, the smaller the gap, the greater the chance of success.

**Jager, A., and Reijnders, V., 2006, 'E-Governance in the Developing World in Action: The Case of DistrictNet in Uganda', IICD: The Hague**

<http://www.iicd.org/files/DistrictNet-final.pdf>

## **SOCIAL MEDIA IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED STATES**

The growth of social media has changed the information space around conflict. People affected by conflict increasingly have the tools to record and share their experiences with the world and to be a part of the media through the use of a cellphone camera and internet access. Information that moves through these networks can have an impact on the course and outcome of the war by affecting public opinion and support domestically and internationally (Sigal, 2009).

While social media can contribute to stability, dialogue, collective identity, and nonviolent political solutions in conflict-affected and fragile states, it can also have adverse outcomes. Elites and others seeking power can use these same tools to organize for political influence, recruitment, and political violence. Citizens too may use ICTs to polarize groups, spread rumors, strengthen biases and foment violence.

Kenya provides an example of both the positive and negative consequences of new media. During the 2007-2008 presidential election crisis, the use of mobile phones made it cheap and easy to spread hateful and violent messages that contributed to mob violence. At the same time, an online human rights campaign called Ushahidi spread awareness of incidents of violence (and their location) using Google Maps and a tool for users to report incidents via mobile phone or Internet browser. Ushahidi allowed for cooperation on a massive scale and provided an outlet for frustrated citizens to become reporters and digital activists.

Despite the transformation of the media landscape, donors and policymakers have often debated and designed policies and programmes in conflict-affected and fragile states based on traditional media. This has largely been the case with evaluations of media's effect on early warning, conflict, state stability and post-conflict reconstruction and governance. Assessments and initiatives related to conflict reporting and peace journalism; and support to independent media are also largely based on conventional media despite the challenge posed to this model by new technologies (Sigal, 2009).

**Sigal, I., 2009, 'Digital Media in Conflict-Prone Societies', Center for International Media Assistance, National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, DC**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4127>

Can digital media help to build peace in weak and conflict-ridden states or will they foment violence? This paper discusses participatory digital media in the context of 21st century conflicts. It argues that successful intervention cannot be based on the operating frameworks of traditional media support. Evidence from case studies in Afghanistan, Kenya, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Burma demonstrates that digital media strategies require dynamism, flexibility and close attention to grassroots reality if they are to build political participation, openness and trust.

**Livingston, S. L., 2011, 'Africa's Evolving Infosystems: A Pathway to Security and Stability', Research Paper, no. 2, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Boulder, Colorado**

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=4068>

How are new information and communication technologies contributing to democratic development in Africa? How can the international community support these? This paper argues that political instability and violence in Africa are often the products of rumour and misinformation. It highlights how new information technology is improving information-sharing, education, and accountability. Policy initiatives should focus on encouraging the further development of reliable and innovative communication institutions. These are indispensable paths to greater security, democratic stability, and development.

**Goldstein, J. and Rotich, J., 2008, 'Digital Networked Technologies in Kenya's 2007-2008 Post-Election Crisis', The Berkman Center for Technology and Society, Harvard University**

[http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Goldstein&Rotich\\_Digitally\\_Networked\\_Technology\\_Kenyas\\_Crisis.pdf.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Goldstein&Rotich_Digitally_Networked_Technology_Kenyas_Crisis.pdf.pdf)

Using the lens of the 2007–2008 Kenyan presidential election crisis, this case study illustrates how digitally networked technologies, specifically mobile phones and the Internet, were a catalyst to both predatory behavior such as ethnic-based mob violence and to civic behavior such as citizen journalism and human rights campaigns. The paper concludes with the notion that while digital tools can help promote transparency and keep perpetrators from facing impunity, they can also increase the ease of promoting hate speech and ethnic divisions.

**Mäkinen, M., and Wangu Kuira, M., 2008, 'Social Media and Post-election Crisis in Kenya', The International Journal of Press/Politics, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 328-335**

<http://hij.sagepub.com/content/13/3/328.short>

What was the role of the media during the two months of postelection crisis in 2008 in Kenya? This article discusses how people exchanged information during and after the media ban and analyses online discussions and media coverage. Particular emphasis is given to the role of social media, such as Web 2.0 communication tools and services, which enable citizens to interact or share content online. The paper shows that during the crisis, social media functioned as an alternative mechanism for citizen

communication or participatory journalism. It argues this experience has important implications for the process of democratisation in Kenya.

## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

[Clay Shirky weblog](#)

[iRevolution: from innovation to revolution](#)

[The Meta-Activism Project](#)

[Social Media Today](#)