The Interpretation of Political Communication

NPS: A Tested Platform for Political Transformation Against Anger and Apathy in Pakistan

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Abstract: Political inaction is a major 'Barrier' to the progress of democratic values and systems in a society. It is more critical in the developing countries like Pakistan. A huge body of research on political apathy and anger in Pakistan is reporting over and over on the causes and consequences of this pathetic psychology. All that is true however, rays of hope are always there provided nations continue searching for the opportunities through scientific and rigorous research accompanied with sincerity and sense of responsibility at all the decision making levels of the state. This paper postulates a solution model for the issue in the perspectives of Pakistan by capitalizing on the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the Instant Political Transformation of the developing countries like Egypt & Libya. The New Public Sphere (NPS) is populated with Global Civil Society (GCS) where International Citizens are connected together 24/7 from any corner of the Global Village and involved in use of ICT for Social Activism. Pakistan now has millions of Internet and Cell-users who are the part of GCS and waiting for a 'Trigger' to switch from the 'Informal Activism to Formal & Political Activism' through NPS.

Keywords: information and communication technologies; new public sphere; global civil society; apathy

1. Introduction

If social activism in the public sphere lacks political dimension, the civic progress cannot be expected because the future of democracy is doomed. Apathy is the name of Political inactiveness. According to the researchers apathy is actually a part of anger. Anger can be aggressive or passive. The passive anger is the apathy. Furthermore, apathy is a psychological problem for *depressed* people who are characterized with a sense that 'nothing matters', 'lack of will to go on' and 'inability to care about the consequences'. This may be true that 'The opposite of love is not hate, it is apathy.' Whatever, the psychologists note that 'apathy occurs due to brain damage' and it should be regarded as a syndrome or illness.

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The fundamental principle of the public sphere is the 'principle of public information' which once had to be fought for against the cryptic policies of monarchies and which since then has made possible the democratic control of state activities-the sphere of public authority (Habermas, 1974). Particularly, the internet and related technologies are increasing avenues for personal expression and promoting citizen activity (Papacharissi, 2002). Since the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, the global civil society has grown from millions into billions. At the same time, social media have become a fact of life for civil society worldwide, involving many actors like regular citizens, activists, nongovernmental organizations, and firms of telecommunications, software providers, and government agencies (Zubair et al., 2011a).

It is through the media, both mass media and horizontal networks of communication, that non-state actors influence people's thinking and foster social change. Ultimately, the transformation of consciousness does have impact on political behavior, on voting patterns, and on the decisions of governments. It is at the level of media politics where it appears that societies can be moved in a direction that diverges from the values, norms and interests institutionalized in the political system (Castells, 2008). Social media may be thought as a long-term tool that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere. In contrast to the instrumental view of Internet freedom, this can be called the 'environmental' view. According to this view, positive changes in the life of a country, including pro-democratic regime change, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public sphere (Shirky, 2011).

Internet and wireless communication, by enacting a global, horizontal network of communication, provide both an organizing tool and a means for debate, dialogue, and collective decision making (Castells, 2008). Internet enthusiasts believe that the Internet can contribute to democracy by bonding people, regardless of territory, and by creating public spheres and new social movements (Rheingold, 1993; Schwartz, 1996). Many studies (Ott & Rosser, 2000; Hill & Sen, 2005) have shown how citizens use computers and the Internet for enhanced political and democratic initiatives. For the so-called cyber pessimists, however, the Internet is a digital replica of the real world where one observes politics as usual (Min, 2010; Zubair et al., 2011b).

ICTs impact on individual, society and state is though drastic, however it is arguable to say that national public sphere has transformed into global public sphere. There are social and political prerequisites too, and it is debatable whether transnational analogues to domestic conditions exist (Crack, 2007). On the other hand some suggest that though there is no global state at planetary level however global networks of governance are emerging and may play the role that nation state play within its territory (Castells, 2008). Anyhow, the global ICT-infrastructure

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continues to grow as does the use of this media to negotiate social change and justice (Custard, 2008).

2. Apathy & Anger in Public Sphere

Apathy is a state of indifference, or the suppression of emotions such as concern, excitement, motivation and passion. An apathetic individual has an absence of interest in or concern about emotional, social, spiritual, philosophical and/or physical life. But contrary to this, an apathetic individual may take interest in emotional, social, spiritual, philosophical and/or physical life's attributes. Not necessarily to end that apathy but in order to find a deeper meaning to the existential meaning of being, part of which necessitates apathy, for we are by definition 'without meaning (Collins Dictionary & Thesaurus, 1998).

They may lack a sense of purpose or meaning in their life. He or she may also exhibit insensibility or sluggishness. The opposite of apathy is flow. In Positive Psychology, apathy is described as a result of the individual feeling they do not possess the level of skill required to confront a challenge. It may also be a result of perceiving no challenge at all (e.g. the challenge is irrelevant to them, or conversely, they have learned helplessness). In light of the insurmountable certainty of universal doom, apathy is the default mode of existential nihilism, such, is not considered to be a pathological state by those who experience it (Collins Dictionary & Thesaurus, 1998).

3. New Public Sphere (NPS)

The story of public-sphere started with the invention of press by Gutenberg in 1438 and continued progressing along with the emerging technologies like electric telegraph invented by Morse in 1837, telephone by Bell in 1876, radio, invented by Marconi in 1895 and in 1923 Baird's television – all brought with it the most speculation of its democratizing power (Gordon, 2004). Digital revolution by computers, networks, Internet and now social networking have raised the notion of not only public sphere rather 'global public sphere' to its heights (Nawaz, 2010, 2011).

ICTs have created a new 'global-village' with 'international-citizens' who use social software to stay connected (24/7) with each other to socialize internationally and discuss matters of mutual interest like global warming and terrorism. Traditionally, the global interactions depended mostly on the physical tools and then mass media. However, the interaction was limited, one-way and very slow. The internet has created a cyberspace where anybody from anywhere can log on the system at any time and continue interacting with the world community. A

diversity of tools are popularly used at the moment like facebook, twitter and blogging are the buzzwords across the global civil society (Zubair et al., 2011a).

It should however be noted that new public sphere is not a blessing in itself rather it requires legal, social, political and ethical guidelines for operating in the favor of the global civil society. Thus there are both opportunities and threats from the new public space or virtual platform for the international citizenship (Zubair et al., 2011b). Both positive and negative aspects must be identified continuously so that both the international institutions as well as the individual states can formulate their ePolicies and policies for international affairs in an effective manner thereby making the new public sphere as an opportunity of the newly emerging new global civil society.

4. Political Transformation: Emerging Political Hierarchies

There is transformation of a public sphere anchored around the national institutions of territorially bound societies to a public sphere constituted around the media system (Volkmer, 1999). There is a public sphere in the international arena. It exists within the political and institutional space that is not subject to any particular sovereign authority but, instead, is shaped by the variable geometry of relationships between states and global non-state actors (El-Nawawy & Iskander, 2002). It is widely recognized that diverse social interests express themselves in this international arena: multinational corporations, world religions, cultural creators, public intellectuals, and self-defined global cosmopolitans (Castells, 2008).

Our interactions with one another today are increasingly multimodal. We conduct our relationships face-to-face, over the phone, and online through modes as varied as e-mail, instant messaging, social network friending, personal messages, comments, shared participation in discussion forums and online games, and the sharing of digital photos, music, and videos. Research is increasingly signifying that the closer the relationship, the more modes people use to communicate with one another (Haythornthwaite, 2005:721). The public sphere is the space of communication of ideas and projects that emerge from society and are addressed to the decision makers in the institutions of society (Castells, 2008; Zubair et al., 2011a).

Interaction between citizens, civil society, and the state, communicating through the public sphere ensure that the balance between stability and social change is maintained in the conduct of public affairs (Castells, 2008). Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), grassroots activists, and social movement actors are becoming more intertwined to leverage their strengths and make an impact on local, national, and global realities. NGOs are key players in this global network. These influence international and state policies by researching and disseminating

information, launching awareness campaigns, lobbying, and organizing direct action in collaboration with other organizations and networks (Custard, 2008).

The rise of NGOs with a global or international frame of reference in their action and goals is referred to as "global civil society" by many analysts (Kaldor, 2003). The key tactics of NGOs to accomplish results and build support for their causes is media politics (Gillmor 2004; Dean et al., 2006). These organizations reach the public and mobilize support for their causes by using media. They put pressure on governments threatened by the voters or on corporations fearful of consumers' reactions. Since these are global campaigns, global media are the key target. The globalization of communication leads to the globalization of media politics (Castells, 2008).

5. Digital Technologies

ICT is a shorthand for the computers, software, networks, satellite links and related systems that allow people to access, analyze, create, exchange and use data, information, and knowledge in ways that were unimaginable before. ICT is used almost interchangeably with the Internet (Beebe, 2004). Internet technologies (now incorporating "Web 2.0" technologies such as wikis, blogs, RSS), virtual reality applications and/or videogames and mobile devices are some of the many technologies used today for communication and entertainment (Nawaz & Kundi, 2010).

In the new public sphere much activity is growing in the areas of business, education, and culture. Concerning advertising and promotions, there is a list of 126 prominent real life brands in Second Life as of August 31, 2007, including IBM, Mercedes, Pontiac, Nissan, Dell, BMG (in the media Sector), and PA Consulting (Barnes, 2007). In retailing and service businesses, there were 25,365 business owners in Second Life in February 2007, most of who owned stores, rented real estate, or managed clubs (DMD et al., 2007). Business, public organizations, and cultural groups are using this environment for conferencing, public meetings, delivering informational services, and performances or exhibits (Zubair et al., 2011a).

Acquiring and dispersing political communication online is fast, easy, affordable, and convenient (Abramson et al., 1988). New technologies provide information and tools that can extend the role of the public in the social and political spheres. The emergence of online political groups and activism certainly reflects political uses of the internet (Bowen, 1996; Browning, 1996). The cyberspace translates into a virtual world and specific locations with in this vast digital space become identical with the intellectual forum identified by Habermas as the 'bourgeois public sphere'. Within this framework, despite the structural transformations in

society, geographically dispersed intelligence can converge in cyberspace to engage in rational and critical debate (Ubayasiri, 2006). PC and Internet created the facilities to connect and interact with other users across the globe (Messinger et al., 2008). The current media system is multi-layered. It is local and global at the same time (Castells, 2008, p. 90).

The distinctive feature of open virtual worlds is the social interaction among people and their avatars that take place in a 3D immersive shared environment with user-chosen objectives, user-generated content and social networking tools. In these worlds, people can form relationships in a variety of ways; as friends, romantic partners, virtual family members, business partners, team members, group members, and online community members (Lederman, 2007). They can also create things, and save, give, or even sell what they created to other people. And, as the objects that are created might be desired by others, so they suddenly have value in the real-world economy (Lastowka & Hunter, 2006). These features make virtual worlds as desirable virtual spaces for collaborative play, learning, and work (Messinger et al., 2008).

The new public sphere is emerging out of the digital gadgets starting from a 'computer' then connecting these computers together into 'Network', these networks first started within a building, then cities, states and finally 'global-networks' came up with the concepts of 'Internet', which is now working as real global platform thereby giving every citizen an opportunity to become an 'international-citizen' (Chan & Lee, 2007). This platform has offered global discussion and dialogue opportunities that can be continued 24/7. Internet, like other digital tools, works with hardware and software devices to communicate and exchange messages and files (Nawaz, 2010).

'Social-software' is that creed of software which helps in conducting social activities and socializing process at any temporal level including the international communications. As a result a 'new environment' of global interaction is being established, which has both positive and negative consequences for the international community (Oblak, 2002). The social software has created and activated 'new public sphere' as a backdrop of global communications for the novel 'global society' which never existed in a form that every member of this community can instantly communicate or interact with another member beyond the limits of time and space (Kundi & Nawaz, 2010).

Social Software

Social software can be broadly defined as tools and environments that facilitate activities in digital social networks (Chatti et al., 2006). Digital social networks are social networks mainly realized by means of computer-mediated communication. Most social software research concentrates on the relations between social entities in digital social networks and their interaction, while community information

systems contain and group social entities (Klamma et al., 2007). What makes social network sites distinctive is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks (Nawaz & Kundi, 2010c).

Social software is a very difficult concept to define. The term encompasses a wide range of different technologies, along with the social aspect of the technologies that often emerges from a combined use of different technologies. Commonly used social software includes weblogs, wikis, RSS feeds and social bookmarking (Dalsgaard, 2006). The social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to: construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Nawaz, 2012).

The blogs are a class of software often used in organizations nowadays, e.g. corporate wikis, social bookmarks, and RSS web feeds (Kumar et al., 2004). The term 'Blog' is a contraction of 'Weblog' and the act of 'Blogging' is the making of such logs. For some businesses, the 'real' news isn't just a ticker-tape-like news feed from Reuters or the BBC. In business, the most significant news is what you and those you have reason to care about, did yesterday, are doing today, and plan to do tomorrow (Klamma et al., 2007).

Finally, wikis can also be catalogued as social software tools. A wiki is a web page which can be edited dynamically directly from the web page itself. In principle, everybody with access to a wiki can amend it. It is possible to either edit a current page or create new pages through new hyperlinks. A wiki keeps track of changes meaning that one can view previous versions of each page on a wiki. The most renowned implementation of a wiki is wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org), an online encyclopedia which everybody can edit. Wikis support collaborative construction, development and production (Dalsgaard, 2006).

Free & Open Sources Systems (FOSS)

The history of social software is as long as the history of computers itself, for example, it took the Web less than four years to attract 50 million users while radio needed almost 40 years to gain the same number of users (Mejias, 2006). While some research material has been available electronically from the first days of the Internet, libraries are putting more and more material on the Web and thus becoming virtual libraries. For example, the University of Texas made a move toward a bookless library system by posting 60,000 volumes online and trying to bring all their collections online (Nawaz et al., 2011).

Carey & Gleason (2006) note that open source systems are becoming culture in the society, for example, in the February 2006 survey of U.S. higher education chief information officers (CIOs), it was found that two-third of the CIOs have either

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adopted or seriously planning in the favor of FOSS. Robert Stephenson, (2006) defines FOSS in the language of Richard Stallman, the founder of Free Software Movement, "as a matter of liberty, not price." Free software refers to four kinds of freedom for the users: "The freedom to run the program, for any purpose; The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs; The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor; The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements to the public, so that the whole community benefits."

6. Discussions

Internet enthusiasts assert that the main advantage of the internet as a public sphere is grounded in the fact that it provides a place for personal expression. It makes it possible for little-known individuals and groups to reach out to citizens directly and restructure public affairs, and connects the government to citizens (Papacharissi, 2002). Most Realist scholarship perceives technology as a passive and exogenous factor, contributing to the power capabilities of states, which strive for security and welfare in an anarchic environment. Technological leadership and control of large technological systems is imperative to maintain or improve a relative power position in the international system. Technology is instrumental in achieving political goals (Fritsch, 2011).

Mere access to the internet does not guarantee increased political activity or enlightened political discourse. Moving political discussion to an online space excludes those with no access to this space. Moreover, connectivity does not ensure a more representative and robust public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). There is a concern that ICTs, which are expected to contribute to the development of all humans, actually widen the inequalities between the developed world and the underdeveloped world, the rich and poor, whites and blacks, the educated and less-educated, etc., creating the so-called 'digital divide' (Warschauer, 2003; Van Dijk, 2005; Min, 2010).

The network society is marked by a trend towards individualization, social fragmentation and new forms of mediated community. The logic of networked organization is horizontally differentiated and polycentric. The old cohesive hierarchies are replaced by a multitude of strategically important 'nodes' in the network, which can cooperate and conflict with one another. Network structures encompass all spheres of society, including politics, government, the economy, technology, and the community (Crack, 2007). The decreased ability of territorially based political systems to manage the world's problems on a global scale has induced the rise of a global civil society (Castells, 2008).

7. Conclusions

Advocates of cyberspace expect that online discourse will increase political participation and open vistas for democracy (Poster, 1995). They claim that the alleged decline of the public sphere lamented by academics, politicos, and several members of the public will be halted by the democratizing effects of the internet and its surrounding technologies. On the other hand, skeptics caution that technologies not universally accessible and ones that frequently provoke fragmented, nonsensical, and enraged discussion, otherwise known as 'flaming', far from guarantee a revived public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002).

The concept of public sphere relies on the existing communication processes and it depends on the working of the dominant forms of communication (Oblak, 2002). Temporal and spatial obstacles in distant communication have been effectively eradicated by opening up cyberspaces. A communicative network is the precondition of transnational public spheres that enable broad participation across state borders. The technologies of the networked society do not merely expanded previous communication media, but are qualitatively different in terms of structure, speed, and scope. Consider the Internet. It is a matrix of networks based on a 'many-to-many' model of information distribution, as opposed to the 'one-to-many' structure of mass media of 20th century (Crack, 2007).

Internet-based technologies can help to connect, motivate, and organize dissent however, whether the expression of dissent is powerful enough to bring social change is a question of human character and a more complex issue. Digital technologies offer additional tools, but they cannot single-handedly transform a political and economic structure that has thrived for centuries (Papacharissi, 2002). It is important to appreciate the complex problems that are implicated in the task of restructuring the public sphere in an internationally anarchic environment. These emanate from the traditional association of the virtual space of the public sphere with the physical space of the territorial nation-state (Crack, 2007). However, a researcher argues that the current Internet 'access divide' will persist in the form of 'usage-divides' (Min, 2010).

The internet may enhance the public sphere, but it does so in an unprecedented way that is not comparable to our past experiences. The internet will not become the new public sphere, but something radically different. This may enhance democracy and dialogue, but not in a way that we would expect it to, or in a way that we have experienced in the past (Papacharissi, 2002). The network society is marked by a trend towards individualization, social fragmentation and new forms of community. The old hierarchies are replaced by strategically important connections in the network, which can cooperate and conflict with one another. Network structures have penetrated into every sphere of life, including politics, government, economy, technology, and the community as a whole. These processes symbolize a

disruption in conventional understandings of space, borders, and territory, and directly impact on the institutional foundations of public sphere (Crack, 2007; Castells, 2008).

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