



SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE NEW WORLD INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ORDER (NWICO)

Neipechaü Mepfhüo

Research Scholar, Assam University, Diphu Campus, Assam

Abstract:

'Connecting with the world is just a click away'- this new catch- phrase of the 21st century owes its emergence to the latest technological innovations in communication. The internet along with the various applications and social networking sites has shrunk the world, making communication easier and faster. These new communication technologies has ushered in an era marked by the availability of a wide range of information which is easily accessible and which can be shared around the globe within seconds. These new developments in communication technology have brought pivotal changes in the way human beings interact with each other which in turn has ushered in a new era of New World Information and Communication Order.

Key Words: Social Media, New World Information and Communication Order, Citizen Journalism, Convergence Theory& Networked Society

Introduction:

It is without a doubt that every new development in communication has brought forth immense changes in the society and in the everyday life of the individual. For instance, Gutenberg's printing press in the 15th century played a crucial role in weakening the power of the medieval church leading ultimately to the Renaissance, and later the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. While the invention of the telephone in 1876 by Alexander Graham Bell made the world smaller and more accessible to all; it has also fostered a whole host of new inventions like the cellular phone and the internet. In this new era of digital revolution, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) consisting of the internet and social media has led to more efficient means of sharing information. Traditional technologies which were earlier limited to agencies and research institutes are now being made accessible to the non- technical citizens. The new ICTs particularly social media with its easy accessibility and capacity to reach millions within a few seconds has brought forth a new era of citizen journalism thereby breaking the monopoly of the traditional mass media (television and print media) over the flow of communication. The new ICTs along with their mass media impact has paved the way for a NWICO characterized by free flow and sharing of information from the third world to the first world countries.

New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO):

In December 1984 the United States withdrew from membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹One of the major reasons cited for the withdrawal was the perception held by the United States that the UNESCO secretariat supported the debate for the establishment of the NWICO. The NWICO was the creation of the UNESCO sponsored MacBride Commission named after its chairman Sean MacBride in 1977. The Commission was established with the purpose of investigating ways through which a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) could be created for protecting the third world mass communication

¹ Stephen Raube-Wilson, *The New World Information and Communication Order and International Human Rights Law*, Boston College International and Comparative Law Review, Volume 9, Issue 1, Article 5, p. 107. <http://www.lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu>.

systems from domination by the First World Countries. Third World Nations had complained that Western News Agencies, with the blessings of their governments, use their virtual monopoly on news dissemination to vilify the third world, ignoring positive developments.² The MacBride Commission therefore recommended curbs on the uncontrolled flow of information from the first world countries to the third world by emphasizing on stricter government control over the activities of the press.

The concept of NWICO became a global media policy debate from the 1970s till through the 1990s. By the early 1970s the developing countries had a great deal of political power and economic potential, with the support of such organizations as Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).³ All of these factors created new relations in the international arena and it appeared as if a new chapter in world history was in the making. The first event that launched the need for a NWICO was the NAM Symposium on Information in Tunisia in March 1976. One of the main resolutions of this Symposium includes:

Since Information in the world shows a disequilibrium favoring some and ignoring others. It is the duty of the non-aligned countries and the other developing countries to change this situation and obtain the decolonisation of information and initiate a new international order in information.⁴

Following the Tunisian Symposium in 1976 the NAM Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi adopted the 'New Delhi Declaration' which served as the main reasoning behind the creation of NWICO. Some of the main points of this Declaration are:⁵

- ✓ The present global information flows are marked by a serious inadequacy and imbalance. The means of communication are concentrated in the hands of a few countries. The great majority of countries are reduced to being passive recipients of information which is disseminated from a few countries.
- ✓ The situation perpetuates the colonial era of dependence and domination. It confines judgments and decisions on what should be known, and how it should be made known in the hands of a few.
- ✓ The dissemination of information rests at present in the hands of a few agencies located in a few developed countries and the rest of the peoples of the world are forced to see each other, and even themselves, through the medium of these agencies.

The continued debate on the NWICO in the 21st Century has been more or less replaced by the free flow and sharing of information made possible by the new ICTs, social media in particular.

Social Media:

Social media is broadly defined as a virtual platform which encourages "users to engage in social behaviors online or on a mobile phone."⁶ Social media is also defined as, "the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, micro-blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and

² Edt. Doris A. Graber, *Media Power in Politics*, McMillan India Ltd., New Delhi, 1990, p.398.

³ Kaarle Nordenstreng, *the New World Information and Communication Order: an Idea that refuses to Die*, <http://www.uta.fi>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Suw Charman Anderson, *Making the Connection: Civil Society and Social Media*, Carnegie UK Trust, 2010, p. 5.

wikis are among the different types of social media.”⁷ In comparison to the other modes of communication like television, radio or even print media, social media possesses two important advantages- firstly; it increases the flow of information. Sharing of information on social media is faster as information does not usually go through the filtering process like most of the other modes of communication; the users generally have greater control over the flow of information or content. Secondly, it creates new communities which can cut across borders. Social media provides opportunities for creating online communities, the membership of which is most of the time open to all.

The appeal of social media lies in the fact that it facilitates free and open communication unlike traditional media limited by too many restrictions and censorships. In recent years, participation in social networking sites has gone from sharing personal information to sharing news updates about local, national and global issues and causes. With the increasing number of users and the ever increasing audience social media has become an efficient tool in marketing, social activism and political campaigning. Before the advent of social media the ability to create and distribute information solely rested with the media, however, the social networking sites has now shifted this capacity to the users, the ordinary people, by enabling them to create and distribute their own content in the form of texts, images, audios and videos. Within the last two decade social media has revolutionalized the way people communicate and interact with each other and it still continues to bring in new changes through the introduction of new applications (apps) and features. Even though social media is being heralded as the new communication revolution, some critics view it simply as a passing fad. However, inspite of the criticisms social media is not just a trend which would fade out soon nor can its impact be undermined.

Social Media as the New Form of Mass Media:

Social media has been heralded as the new and improved form of mass media. Mass media is defined simply as those forms of communication channels which possesses the capacity to reach a large number of people. In the last two decades or so traditional or old mass media has undergone a change, owing due to the emergence of social media or new media. Distinction between traditional media and social media are made based on their mode of production and distribution/transmission. The production process involves collection of information, while the distribution process involves disseminating the information product to the consumers. Traditional or old media includes broadcast media (television, radio and films) and print media (newspapers, magazines and journals). In traditional media, the mode of production and distribution/transmission denotes a ‘one way communication system,’ whereby; production and transmission are carried out by one producer and transmitted to the consumers. For instance, in the case of the news channels, the production and distribution process solely rest with the channels and their news teams. Social media on the other hand, consist of the social networking sites. Unlike traditional or old media, social media involves a two way communication system, whereby, the participants act as both producers and consumers. For instance, social networking sites allow the users to share information and interact with a vast audience at the same time. However, in recent years the distinctions between traditional and social media are getting blurred owing due to what Kenneth C. Killebrew calls ‘convergence.’ He defines convergence as,

⁷ [http://www. http://whatistechtarget.com/definition/social-media](http://www.whatistechtarget.com/definition/social-media).

“Convergence is a movement in the field of mass communications undertaken in the late twentieth century and now moving quickly in the early twenty- first century, that weds previously competitive media delivery formats (platforms) to one another.”⁸

In explaining convergence Killebrew firstly, categorizes mass media into three distinct platforms based on their information delivery or distribution- print media (newspapers, magazines), broadcast media (television and radio) and new media (internet and the other formats). The general idea behind this concept is to bring these three categories together in order to achieve relatively equal distribution of information from each platform.

The current impact of social media on traditional media can be explained based on Killebrew’s convergence process. Social media with its interactive user features has produced a profound impact on traditional media. Social media is increasingly viewed as a threat to broadcast and print media as people are now relying more on social media sources for information. The social media outlets like blogs, forum, online communities etc with its capacity to share news to a vast audience within a few seconds have increased the reliance on social media tools for information. However, to counter this threat, traditional media has merged itself with the social media tools; many of the news channels and newspapers now have their own web pages with social media links to broadcast news online as well as to interact with their audience. There is now a three way interaction system between the three media sources- broadcast, print and social media; with social media supplementing traditional media in terms of information sources and valuable user inputs. The combination of traditional and social media together has the capacity to produce profound impacts, for instance, CNN’s citizen journalism initiative, iReport, has grown to epic proportions, with over 1 million iReporters around the globe submitting stories.⁹ In recent years, social media and traditional media have come to play complementary roles. Social media benefits traditional media in three ways, firstly, it helps traditional media to reach a vast audience within a short span of time, secondly, it provides information sources which can be tracked down and verified, and thirdly, social media serves as a platform for advertisement for traditional media. Traditional media on the other hand benefits social media by providing media coverage to issues, news or events broadcast online via social media, moreover, it has the advantage of having a stable and established viewing audience.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the interaction of the new and traditional mass media in a third world country in the 21st Century is the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. When the government banned reporters from Tahrir Square it was the citizens who disseminated information, pictures and videos to the world. Many of the protesters posted minute by minute updates as well as videos of the revolution which kept the foreigners as well as the Egyptians abroad updated on the happenings in Egypt. The protesters were able to show the world their version of events to the world as well as reveal the true side of Mubarak’s regime. Many of these videos, images and updates were used as sources by television news channels such as Al Jazeera, CNN and BBC. *Facebook* and *Twitter* played a crucial role in disseminating information to the outside world when the ruling regime shut down the local media.

⁸ Kenneth C. Killebrew, *Managing Media Convergence: Pathways to Journalistic Cooperation*, Surjeet Publications, Delhi, 1st Edition, 2005, p.40.

⁹ Ann Marie van den Hurl, *New Dynamics in Social and Crisis Communications*, May 9, 2013, <http://www.quepublishing.com/articles/article.aspx?p=2041296&seqNum=5>.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, what the world is experiencing now is a NWICO where there is unrestricted flow of unfiltered communication which is made easily accessible to all. Social media which is a sub- aspect of the ICTs has emerged as a powerful tool in the hands of the ordinary citizens, directly challenging the manipulation of the mass media by the rich first world corporations. This free flow of information has given birth to a brave new world, where, the voice of the third world is no longer suppressed. According to the European Commission, the importance of ICTs lies less in the technology itself than in its ability to create greater access to information and communication in underserved populations.¹⁰In their report, *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics*, Jessica Clark and Patricia Aufderheide (2009) describe the landscape we now inhabit:

“Commercial media still dominate the scene, but the people formerly known as the audience are spending less time with older media formats. Many (people) now inhabit a multimedia-saturated environment that spans highly interactive mobile and gaming devices, social networks, chat – and only sometimes television or newspapers. People are dumping land lines for (mobile) phones and watching movies and TV shows on their computers. While broadcast still reaches more people, the Internet (whether accessed through phones, laptops, or multimedia entertainment devices) has become a mass medium.”¹¹

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¹⁰ <http://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/ICT-information-and-communications-technology-or-technologies>.

¹¹ Suw Charman Anderson, *op cit.*, p.9.