

# Social Technology and the New Forces that Dominate Social and Political Systems

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## Introduction

We live in a period of “social technology”, in which social changes are determined by new technology. Although there are different forces that contribute to the global environment that is dominated by social technology, including social networks, digital technology and new media - there can be no argument that technology has tremendous impact on social and political developments as well as the global economy. It is more obvious today than any time before, that our current “network society” is a product of the digital revolution and sociocultural changes (Castells, 2015). According to Leong (2017), information and communication technology created a global “network society” which allows real-time interaction between people and organizations in diverse educational, culture, economic and political domains.

Social technology a way of using human, intellectual and digital resources in order to influence social processes (Tamošiūnaitė, 2018). It is a process model for citizen participation in public decision-making using integrated social technologies (Tamošiūnaitė, 2017). But although technology is crucial in shaping social and political discourse (Reuben, 2014), definition of social technology is not easy. As a general definition, we can say that technology consists of two primary components: a physical component which comprises of items such as products, tooling, equipment, blueprints, techniques, and processes; and the informational component which consists of know-how in management, marketing, production, quality control, reliability, skilled labor and functional areas (Kumar, Kumar and Persaud, 1999). In examining the social impact of technology, it is evident that global media and social networks forced changes in the policy of governments and created a new reality of dominance of global issues (Schejter, 2009). The global flow of cultural media products means that cultural distinctions have become less powerful than the free flow of information and the spread of commercial programming (Katz, 2009). As a result, scholars argue that social media functions as both a public sphere and as a communicative/organizational tool (for example: Howard and Hussain, 2011; Shirky, 2011).

The research claims that the main forces behind the social technology revolution consist of globalization, social networks and government policies. The new environment of social technology is different in many ways from the way traditional media operated (Harrelson, 2016), since the supremacy of new technology and global media enforce new standards on the media. New media significantly transformed as global coverage took center stage and social networks provide instant and unlimited information (Katz, 2009). Media events have become globalized products and journalism became part of a mix of media elements (Sparks, 2005). As the past decade proved, political independence and the spread of technology brought an immense optimism for new social movements to achieve better living standard. As the research demonstrates, the political environment is deeply influenced by the counter relations of media and politics. Social media transformed the traditional political uses of the old media and expanded the traditional roles of the press in a democratic society. Consequently, social technology enables the creation of digital public squares and allow the public to connect with government, politicians and social movements.

## Technology and Globalization

In order to understand the role of technology and social media in a globalized world, the research examines the impact of technology on global forces and developments. Although there are different definitions to the new global environment that is dominated by technology, among them “innovation”, “competition between countries”, “digital economy”, “internet economy”, “new economy” or “digitization on the economy”, there can be no argument that the

new global environment has tremendous impact on all countries which gain more influence from investments in the global economy. Technological advances which caused the integration of the economies into a single market have become the determinant of the process of globalization and technology plays a large role in globalization on a cultural, political and economic level. Accordingly, countries that lead the world in generating advanced technologies and leveraging the full productive capacity of their digital economies can gain a strategic competitive advantage (Schwab, 2018).

The research claims that in a globalized world interactive technologies, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are closing the gap between politics, politicians and ordinary citizens. More personal-like technologies, including e-mails, text messages and Whatsapp, allow politicians to interact more spontaneous and personally with their publics – enabling them to conduct personality-centered campaigns. Interactivity with society has become very important and by delivering personal messages and even giving the public insight into their private life, politicians can create a stronger bond with their followers (Utz, 2009). Shirky (2011) claims that the global impact of social media is in spreading ideas of freedom and democracy to the people, motivating them to take their protests onto the streets, assisting in the planning and organization of demonstrations and contributing to the generation of social and political change.

In examining the impact of technology on our lives, there is no doubt that the information age led to a complete revolution in how we communicate and receive information (Castels, 2015). Technology and globalization changed the way that the world operates in all fields: business, government, political, economic and social and cultural (Lawlor, 2007). Technology is changing the way companies and nations work, trade, invest and develop new products. Technology plays a large role in globalization on a cultural, political and economic level, enabling global domination of Western cultural and economic values, while breaking down of cultural and economic borders (Goryakin, Lobsteinc, James and Suhrckebe, 2015). Technology is a vital force in the modern form of global business and competition between countries. It revolutionized the global economy and became critical to competitive strategy (Lamba and Malhotra, 2009). In a global world, where global economy transpires - in contrast to economies that were based on their own closed market - competition between countries is based on innovation. As a result, countries are looking to boost productivity through investments in technology (Brand, 2017).

We live in a world of technology, which is improving at such a rapid rate, that we barely have time to learn the old technology before new technology comes out. This changes the way interact and receive information and leads to questions of how our culture can adapt to such changes and how would technology affect the future. Technology and globalization are fundamental to economic success in an increasingly competitive world and technology is sweeping the transition to digital delivery of services both in public and private sector (Lamba and Malhotra, 2009). As a result, digital technologies gained prominence as critical forces that determine economic growth, and these changes create new possibilities and raise new problems for consumers, businesses, and government agencies and the way technology spreads across countries is central to how global growth is generated and shared across countries (Aslam, Eugster, Ho, Jaumotte, Osorio-Buitron, and Piazza, 2018).

In the new global environment, it is the role of governments to make sure that the marketplace continues to work competitively for businesses and consumers and the next era of globalization will be shaped by customers and technology (Manyika and Lund, 2019). According to the World Economic Forum, the diffusion of knowledge and technology worldwide in recent decades has brought important changes to the global innovation landscape. But those changes could be much more profound if countries created more supportive investment environments (Canuto, 2018). Similarly, much of the political upheaval that has been seen in democracies around the world, including the UK and the US, appears to have to do with the impacts of globalization and technology on the economic confidence of people (Anderson & Coletto, 2017). Fake News was named 2017's word of the year, raising tensions between nations, and may lead to regulation of social media (Carson, 2017).

A major change is that global media coverage created a new reality of dominance of global issues (Schejter, 2009) with growing demand for investigative journalism, alternative voices, accurate information and specialization and in-depth interpretation (Nossek, 2009). The impact of global media and social networks forced changes in the policy of governments as the global flow of cultural media products means that cultural distinctions between nations have become less powerful than the free flow of information and the spread of commercial programming (Katz, 2009). In that way technology elevates the role of globalization. According to Sparks (2005), there is a general consensus that the contemporary world is best understood through the prism of globalization. Opinions differ as to whether globalization is a positive or a negative development, but there is general agreement that whatever is going on is

either a symptom or a consequence of globalization. Still, political content is as prevalent on Facebook - where users mostly follow people they know personally, as it is on Twitter – where users tend to follow a wider mix of connections (Duggan and Smith, 2016).

## **Technology and New Journalism**

New media influence the world in numerous ways, determining dramatic changes in the balance of social and political power (Kaplan, 2015). Social media is crucial in shaping political discourse, allowing people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information (Nations, 2016). It is safe to say that Facebook and Twitter changed the world, both politically and socially, allowing people from all different lifestyles to connect with one another. In more democratic nations, where freedom of speech is promoted, social media shifted the way average people interact and institute change. The novelty and success of social media campaigns, political pages, current events, and promotional ideas that spread through social networks, prove the extent to which people can influence one another, and ultimately the world as a whole. This has altered the manner in which the people of western societies conduct themselves, consume news, and live their everyday lives (Epstein, 2013). To emphasize the impact of new media, it is argued that new technology is not just used to spread political opinions, but also to discuss these opinions with other users on a global scale.

Similarly, with technology, the relations between journalism and politics changed tremendously. In the last two decades there has been an increase in use of the Internet by political actors, as the role of social media has become crucial in shaping political discourse (Garrett, 2019). In the days of "old journalism" information was provided to the public through news conferences, interviews, background briefings, leaks and off-the-record chats. This reality is no longer relevant. In the era of "new journalism" the rules have changed. With new journalism, actual presence is not required since information is gathered from a variety of sources. The traditional media have become less relevant, as politicians who use social media to go over the heads of the traditional media set themselves as more immediate and available to the public. The information age has shifted society's attention away from traditional news outlets such as newspapers, radio and TV channels, to the Internet. New technologies shape our social, political and cultural systems and Facebook, Twitter or YouTube have become a part of everyday communication and significantly changed news consumption and social interaction.

With new media, public agenda is changing, and information is not a monopoly of a limited number of influential sources, as used to be. Traditional media relies on the decision of media organizations to print or televise content, in many cases not according to the way governments or politicians' intent to deliver their messages (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic, 2015). This is what politicians define as bias news, or the term that has become popular – fake news. In contrast, unlike the traditional media, social media provide politicians the opportunity to promote their messages as they intend since the information is unfiltered and not censored (Wolfsfeld, Yarchi & Samuel-Azran, 2015).

As a result, social media became crucial in shaping political discourse and changing the electoral arena, allowing people to interact with each other by sharing and consuming information (Nations, 2016). Facebook and Twitter changed the world, both politically and socially, allowing people from different lifestyles to connect with one another. The success of social media campaigns, with political pages, current events and promotional ideas that spread through social networks, proves the extent to which people can influence one another. The significance of social media in political campaigns is not limited to the extraordinary and instantaneous reach they have, but also in allowing new players to enter the political arena. Similarly, social media is encouraging people to participate in some kind of political discussion or activity online (Cohen and Kahne, 2011).

Technology changed the relations between politicians and the public in terms of determining public agenda. A major change created by new technology is the ability of everyone to influence the news. On social media, anyone can be a commentator, as there is a wider variety of opinions. This opened up new opportunities for individuals and politicians alike. Politicians can create a presence on social media platforms to help shape their public perception (Harrelson, 2016) and people can interact with the media and generate new content because they have easier access to inexpensive communication technologies. What is remarkable today is the ability for the masses to intervene in political stories with effectiveness (Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009). With new journalism, social media became a major tool to disseminate information, opinions, and news, used for political campaigning, offering new opportunities for individuals and politicians alike.

New journalism is changing the way political systems and government operate. In the age of new politics, politicians use a wide array of media, including traditional and social media, to get their message across. A defining characteristic of social media is dialogue, which enables people to share, comment on and discuss a wide variety of topics, grounded on an interactive community (Manyika and Lund, 2019). Public behavior proved the validity of this analysis, since new media increase involvement in political processes and create an incentive to go to vote (Bermingham & Smeaton, 2011).

With the advent of new media, politicians and governments are being forced to deal with political situations over more platforms than before. Since the number of bases to cover have expanded, this leads to an inevitable loosening of governments' control over the political agenda, forcing politicians into an increasingly responsive mode rather than the proactive agenda setting role they used to adopt. As politicians are changing with the emergence of new media, they are using social media to reach out to their audiences, with platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The result of the connection between new journalism and new politics is what is building the influence and demonstrates the success of social technology to what can be defined as a new digital society: a shift of media audience's use is triggering an adaption to different channels of message delivery in order to connect with Internet users.

## Conclusion

We live in the age of technology and innovation, in which social and political changes are determined by technology. The world is changing at a speed that could not be possible at the turn of the century, as the nature of communications changed significantly, based on technological advancement and openness to global developments. The combination of digital technology, social networks and mobile phones accelerated the rate at which information is shared and influence the world. This is what we can define as "social technology", which allow publics – rather than governments or traditional media - to shape the world's events and culture.

The research claims that the role of technology in social and political changes has become crucial with globalization, social networks and government policies that use technology to enhance their global status. It is argued that in this environment where technology determines local as well as global changes, governments need to use technology and social networks to maintain their national interests in global competition. In a global world, where global technology has transpired, creating a global economy that is based on new technology, in contrast to economies that were based on their own closed market, competition between countries is a stimulus to innovation. The result of the change in global economics is that countries that fall behind their rivals technologically and economically became more vulnerable to exploitation. The conclusion of the research is that the new era of social technology requires new thinking about the relationship between politics and social media, between the media and politics as well as between the media and governments.

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