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*Department of Media Sciences
Anna University Chennai
Guindy
Chennai 600025
India.*

*E-mail: jmcs@academicjournals.org
jmcs.journal@gmail.com
<http://www.academicjournals.org/jmcs>*

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Transcendence through social media
Bandopadhyaya Suvojit

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Full Length Research Paper

Transcendence through social media

Bandopadhyaya Suvojit

Centre for Culture, Media and Governance, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India.

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The emergence of social media has created a sudden shift in the dynamics of societal structure. It is no more a physical, aural and visual attribute to meet, communicate or gather at a given time and place. It is the age of online, and the social media is hogging the limelight to capture as many as 'netizens' to indulge and express their thoughts and ideas through social media. Keeping this broad spectrum in mind, this paper focused on how social media has overcome transnational communication barriers and has eroded the concept of territorialization. Emphasis was also laid on emergence of social network as a medium and how it has transcended beyond boundaries. Apart from this, it examines the kind of identity it constitutes with widening of social networking sites. Finally, this study exemplified the potential of social media websites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to proliferate and propagate messages to large number of netizens.

Key words: Trans-nationalism, social media, facebook, twitter.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of trans-nationality in itself has become prevalent in recent times that even the thinnest distinction to evaluate time and space has been blurred. Specifically, after the emergence of globalization and trans-nationalization with respect to migration and interaction of new cultures, the new trend of "global culture" has emerged. Trans-nationalism is a concept that transcends boundaries across time and space and incorporates culture, geographies, traditions and customs. The concept of trans-nationalism emerged in the latter half of the 20th century (David and William, 2003). This terminology was in addition to politics and economy and gained momentum with the development of internet and wireless communication. It was a by-product of modernity and ascended because of migration that took place in the European history due to great depression, European

famine and plague. This resulted in formation of Diaspora communities which further pushed new interactions between local cultures with alien culture of a foreign land.

During 1970s the importance of trans-nationalism was narrowed and was equated to the "perception of locality." There was a new perception of locality beyond time and space and which was multi-dimensional in nature. Trans-national corresponded to the notion of global identity with the emerging times. It asserted a universal, global hegemonic identity. Trans-nationalism is rooted to national identities with business and trade in foreign lands. With the inception of business and trade there was shift in social morphology by movement of people and goods across boundaries. The transportation of capital and products along with movement of people created new networks and gave rise to new Diasporas in new

E-mail: suvo9965@gmail.com.

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geographical entities. This further resulted in formation of distinct social capital between migrants living abroad and those who remain at home (Levitt, 2001b). The concept of trans-nationalism was further propelled with the advancement in information and communication technologies that rapidly helped building cross-cultural ties.

There was a momentous push to socio-economic processes with the emergence of information and communication technologies which democratized trans-nationalism and globalization further. With the rapid diffusion and the continuing development of mobile phones and Internet services, these technologies have been adopted by a large part of the population, thus playing a significant role for everyday interpersonal communication in contemporary societies. They have become inseparable elements of emerging late-modern societal forms such as personal communities, network sociality and mobile sociality. As communication technologies become an integral part of our everyday interpersonal communication landscape, the distinctions gradually decline, both with respect to the functions through technology and usage. Furthermore, the present information and communication technologies intensively supplement or even substitute the prototypical role of face-to-face communication. Therefore, this paper raises question as to how has trans-mediation through social media transcended beyond boundaries and created a social impact (Marwan, 2002).

The concept of trans-nationalism is of particular interest as to the ways in which it is catering to the local culture as well creating niche cultures which are rapidly growing and accommodating in foreign lands. The emergence of social media has created a sudden shift in the dynamics of societal structure. It is no more a physical, aural and visual attribute to meet, communicate or gather at a given time and place. It is the age of online, and the social media is hogging the limelight to capture as many as „netizens“ to indulge and express their thoughts and ideas through social media.

The potential of social media websites like Facebook and Twitter is helping to proliferate and propagate messages to large number of netizens. It also draws attention to the growing new information culture. It is often stated that social media has become an organic media, having no particular hierarchy or structure. It is a network society, which empowers the individual to the communities and in large the organizations bringing forth issues and topics to raise awareness.

Witnessing the scrupulous transformation taking place and the trends of trans-nationalism that are going to stay through communication technologies, this paper draws attention on the following aspects with respect to trans-nationalism.

Firstly, the paper looks at how social media has overcome transnational communication barriers and has eroded the concept of territorialisation. Emphasis will be

given on emergence of social network as a medium and how it has transcended beyond boundaries. Secondly, what kind of identity trans-nationalization constitutes with widening of social media network? Further, to substantiate this work, a case study of the Arab revolution was taken which emerged from Tunisia and passed on to Egypt and Libya.

BRIEF SURVEY OF LITERATURE

The conceptuality of social media and its characteristics of transcendence to go beyond boundaries and establishing relation with individual unknown, unseen is what give social media precedence over mass media. Let us begin with offering a gist of what some of the scholars have offered regarding social media and the conceptuality of trans-nationalization. In her book “Alone Together,” Sherry Turkle expresses her views on both how social networking sites are beneficial as well as criticizes for creating a delusion from real world. She emphasizes the fact that with emergence of such active interaction medium which talks one to one, one to many and many to many has successfully evaded the paradigms of territorialization. She takes into account the example of Facebook and Twitter which has witnessed active participation of people from all sorts. Drawing attention to the emergence of de-territorialization with the „time-space compression“ social networking sites are gaining momentum.

Similarly, Sonia Livingstone, in her book on social changing and consequences of ICTs throws light on a holistic picture that how not only social networking sites but also new media has made communication dynamics so active that the process does not remain anymore one sided. With the growth and proliferation of different websites, it has triggered active participation from both the producer as well as from the consumer side.

Another way to look at transnationalism is through Information society, Informationalism and the Digital network societies as described by Vincent Miller in his book “Understanding Digital Culture”. This area focuses especially on how post-industrialism has brought momentous development in communication technologies, which has resulted in formation of network societies. According to the communication technologies harnessed by individual groups has led to the structure of network societies accordingly. The primary paradigm on which the network societies are resting upon is on the compression of time and space.

On the other hand, it talks about the conceptuality of social networking sites. Rise of such medium is a result of late modernity and certain emerging factors that pushed the need to social network mediums in acceptance. The first factor that Miller talks about is urbanization which has led to need of social networking sites as communication medium. The second factor is the

range of experiences, emotions, feelings, advice, suggestions people want to express and a dire need to reach out to the „world“. Third, and the most dominant factor that has made this communication medium most successful is due to globalization. Globalization has further propelled immense disintegration in societal structures and given rise of extreme individualism. The formation of virtual communities is at peak with rise of the virtual communities which join or raise their voice against issues through liking or adhering to that cause.

Precisely, how we communicate in these moments of historic crisis and transformation is important. The medium that carries the message shapes and defines the message as well. The instantaneous nature of how social media gives the power to communicate, self-broadcast ideas, unlimited by publication deadlines and broadcast news slots, explains the speed with which these revolutions have proliferated across regions.

METHODOLOGY

The paper maps social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to understand trans-nationalism through the lens of online communication platforms. The paper seeks to evaluate the potentialities of trans- mediation through social media platforms using both empirical and practical implications that resulted in binding commonalities irrespective of different geographical spaces. The paper was developed with an initiative to develop a conclusive or summarised argument with respect to transcendence through social media. The arguments derived in this paper are carefully drawn after compilations of several academic works on social media as well as gathering news reports on how social media played a significant role in propagation of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. The paper addresses a timely topic as social media platforms have become a significant part of people's life. It has become a platform of new interactions irrespective of geographies and different cultural contexts. The Arab revolution bears the testimony and brings to the fore how social media platforms have actually acted as a catalyst in toppling governments across the region and created a new social order.

THE POWER TO CHANGE BEGINNING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

After the emergence of new media the world has shrunk. People can view and share information without moving from the corner. New media has significant impact over young age users, along with people participating freely in a democratic set up. People, irrespective of their background, age group, are actively participating in new media via social media platforms, wikis and blogs. The convergence of new and old media trends has brought new wave of active participation towards rebuilding a transformed society. Young generation people have different ways of learning and sharing. The Pew Internet and American Life Project¹ found that 57% of teenagers

create content for the internet -- from text to pictures, music and video. People have freedom to speak, write and share the information and ideas in the modern world through social media anonymously. They have right to criticize on political issues, educational issues and religion issues via social networking sites. People post videos and blogs to support their favourite parties effectively. Students share their learning experiences in colleges and classes online. Moreover, social media has changed the perspective of sharing and commenting on issues which were considered sacrosanct in public arena. The social media has changed communication process dramatically. It has changed the social behaviour of people in terms of information, communication and entertainment. Due to the grace of technology and internet, people are gradually distancing themselves from the older or traditional communicative techniques and appear more through online spaces they are comfortable with. They have started using e-words. The means of information and communication are digital, such as, e-news, e-books, blogs, and e-zones. The information in social media can be shared and redistributed among millions of people irrespective of geographies and varying cultural contexts. The nature of social media platforms has led to catering to more number of people instantaneously. People communicate lively through Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and other digital Medias giving scope to greater proliferation of information and promoting trans-nationalism across the globe. Both the sender and receiver are active participants while communicating. Visual networking sites like YouTube give access to people to view content irrespective of time and place. Therefore, YouTube and other videos networking sites contribute greatly in terms of offering visual content online and generating varied public opinions with respect to the content.

The advancements in communication technologies have led to convergence of old as well as new media resulting in shift in the communication process.

Virtual or second life

Henceforth, social networking sites are creating a new aspect of virtual life by creating an image which is far from realism in society. It is creating a highly individualized and anonymous identity which is unaware of what is happening beyond social web. Increased mobility and advances in communication technology has resulted in a shift in social relations from being place-centred, to becoming person centred and a-spatial.

Roland Robertson (2012) suggests that this has given rise to glocalization and involves a shift away from isolated settlements to more modern urban contexts of social and physical mobility. In glocalization, place is still important; however places are now connected over longer distances outside the locality. Therefore, glocalization has resulted in formation of alternate identities

¹ An organization, based in Washington which monitors behaviors of net surfers with society.

which are impacted due to distorted geographical and cultural exchange faced by the migrants. This has also resulted in developing extreme individualism. In network individualism place to place connection declines compared to person to person connection via the advent of ICT technologies. People no longer assemble together physically to share information and ideas and transnationalisation enters through modern communication platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Thus, social media platforms are catering different kinds of people within an over-arching platform and creating niche communities which are inclined to particular interest of their own and connect to people of similar interests beyond boundaries. There are several factors that point out online or virtual communities offer greater opportunities towards transforming communities.

1. De-traditionalisation allows us to imagine new forms of biographies and community as old forms, traditions and obligations erode or transform.
2. Disembedding allows us more choice in our relationship and group affiliations outside spatial limitations.
3. Globalization exposes us to a variety of cultural resources and experiences.
4. Reflexivity allows us to think more freely about who we are and who we want to be as individuals.
5. A tradition of imagined communities encourages us to find communion with others beyond our locality through media and symbolic resources, and with people who we perhaps never meet face-to-face (Thussu, 2000a, b).

In this respect, it is not surprising that as the new media has become integral to daily life for many; social media also has become a new site for the articulation of all types of groupings and communities giving opportunities to interact with other users and online communities across the globe. It also suggests that as people occupy localized common physical spaces less frequently, communication technologies have begun to take over the space of community. Hence, the notion of transcendence is taking over. The compression of space and time is very much visible as it is eroding social traditional space and constantly encouraging members to create their online space and to reach as many as common members as possible. This certainly seems to be the case when one considers myriad ways in which group relationships are manifested online. Chat rooms, forums, bulletins, board systems and online worlds networking facilities, blogging circles, and many more are examples which are transforming the notion of community, and going beyond defined borders and locality (Krang et al., 2003).

Communities can be for different analogies and are divided as follows:

1. Communities of transaction facilitate the exchange or buying and selling of goods and information.
2. Communities of interest bring together participants who wish to interact about specific topics of interest to

them.

3. Communities of fantasy allow participants to create new environments, identities or imagined worlds.
4. Communities of relationship centre on inter-personal experiences and create networks of support.

Cultural change

In ancient days, people imbibed understanding of the world by learning and experiencing, learning by books, ancestors, and their culture. However, in modern world we learn to retrieve and reference rather than understand. The hypertext development has made the readers to follow links one after another rather than searching for resources physically. The development of new media and extension to social media has given new dimension to cultural norms, communicative patterns, behavioural patterns, way of learning and communicating in the society. People use social networking sites as an instrument to enhance their social skills and improve their societal process around by staying connected with people they aspire to and transformation of relationship among friends and family. "Facebook" is one of the best examples of social networking sites where people maintain their social lives in business, education and family simultaneously.

"One of the most exciting evolutions in the internet over the last few years is the spread of social networks. No other genre of web services has such high expansion rates like the social networking sites. MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook have gained enormous popularity over the past years because of a steadily increasing demand for communication and collaboration among users. Forced by the fast evolution of the internet, innovative web technologies and networking functionalities, the user has changed from a passive information consumer to an active content producer and distributor. As a key success factor, social networking services offer modern communication possibilities for people by supporting user interaction and data interchange" (Leitner and Greching, 2015).

Potential drawbacks

With advancement in technology, there are certain drawbacks associated with them. The most crucial question raised by some academicians is what kind of lifestyle and communication prototype social media is promoting? Currently internet technologies have become more easily accessible and more convenient to use. Henceforth, are these social media platforms going to bring rapid changes to existing norms of the society and further creating altered communication patterns in near future? While probably it is not an issue as of now, but for the future generations being brought up surrounded by ICT technologies, they are more likely to lose the basic

skills of face to face communication? With the mediums like social media it's so easy to create a bubble of interests that one forgets how to tolerate the annoying things in life.

NEW MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE

As social media has brought several changes to the lives of millions. It has affected cultures and identities of many people too. Social media has created many new expressions and renewed interpretations which society has come to accommodate and value. The differing forms of media have affected moral values as well as business, politics and entertainment. It has created a new form of society. It is what Singh (2010) calls a "transformed network society". It is a society that is timeless and always changing. Social media also has certain negative effects. It has at times been seen as a form of evil or threat to traditional societal values. Oftentimes people dislike social media because they do not understand it. It is also a conflicting issue when people are trying to maintain their morals and values yet conforming to society and keeping up with new social innovation. Being in social media also risks the chances of loss of identity and virus attack due to which all personal information of an individual can be taken down without his/her consent. Online networking sites also results in an individual spending more time behind a computer rather than engaging in activities physically. It has created a form of social isolation and has in some ways blocked social interaction in physical world. The list of attacks on social media is a long one and comes from all corners of academia and popular culture. A recent bestseller in the US, *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr, suggested that use of the internet was altering the way we think to make us less capable of digesting large and complex amounts of information, such as books and magazine articles. The book was based on an essay that Carr wrote in the *Atlantic* magazine. It was just as emphatic and was headlined: *Is Google Making Us Stupid?* But even the backlash now has a backlash, with many leaping to the defense of social media. They point out that emails, Twitter and Facebook have led to more communication compared to the past – especially for people who may have trouble meeting in the real world because of great distance or social difference.

However, defenders of social media state irrespective of the communication divide; users adapt according to the format of the websites and get use to the format.

According to experts, debate with respect to social networking sites is still a continuing one with the online networking platforms yet to develop norms and etiquettes which are sacrosanct across all users irrespective of social, cultural and political backgrounds. But, despite extreme criticism social media has managed to attract people across the globe. It is continuously offering

mutual interconnectedness among individuals and cultural exchange leading to greater cultural diversity. In many ways, new media is helping to engage as well as better understand cultures which were unfamiliar and alien to the other parts of the world (Singh, 2010).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION OF 2011

On January 25, 2011 a movement began to overthrow the 29 year rule of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. General masses demonstrated against the incumbent government running a peaceful protest. However, the protest quickly gathered momentum and by February 2, 2011 there were clashes between the policemen and protestors in which 3 innocent lives were lost and an additional 1,500 were injured. Soon after the protests began to grow in magnitude, the Egyptian government completely cut off Internet access and cell phones. This action was taken to restrict the role of Facebook and Twitter circulating provocative messages across the masses. On January 28, 2011 Egypt was completely offline. Facebook and Twitter were used as communication tools to share the sense of frustration felt across the masses against the ruling government.

The movement began with the death of Egyptian businessman Khaled Said who was brutally beaten to death by the Egyptian policemen, which was followed by activist and Google Marketing Manager, Wael Ghonim anonymously creating a Facebook Page titled "We Are All Khaled Said." The page featured brutal graphic post mortem photographs of Said's face that were shot using a cell phone. Immediately, the page had a following of 500,000 members. Ghonim went on to use this Facebook page as a means to expose other cases of police abuse and corruption, eventually orchestrating the protests that began on January 25th.

Twitter was also used to broaden the reach of Ghonim's idea. However, it was used to get the word out mostly to the rest of the world. Facebook and Twitter provided a platform for the frustrated civilians of Egypt to communicate and organize their revolt. Mubarak's administration was aware of this and took measures to block Twitter and Facebook completely by January 26th, 2011. However, it was too late to make measures against the motions that were set into play with the help of social media. Social media and the global reach of the internet facilitated the spread of Ghonim's call to action. In turn, the autocratic government failed to maintain a repressive hold over the repressed masses. On February 11, 2011, 18 days after the first crowd stepped into the streets of Cairo in a united voice of discontent, Hosni Mubarrak stepped down from his presidential seat. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, helped unite the people of Egypt, allowing them to communicate freely and anonymously, organize their mission, show the rest of the world their

struggle, and achieve their goal. Ghonim stated this best, "If you want to liberate (people), give them the internet." This Egyptian revolution further gained momentum and proliferated to Libya toppling Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, leading a freedom from repressive ruler.

Therefore, from the example of Arab revolution uprising we can substantiate the issue that social medium has the potential to leap boundaries, aware millions of people and can create an impact through instant transmission of messages.

Conclusion

It can be safely concluded the fact that social media has transcended boundaries and created new avenues of interaction among like-minded people across the globe. However, with the impact of social media, there has been a momentous shift in societal processes with respect to interaction of cultures, traditions and overall change in the social morphology. There is an altercation of identities and emergence of new identities which are not anymore restricted to one geographical entity. Social media offers a larger platform which functions along different societies simultaneously (Murray, 2006). Social media platforms have successfully gone beyond transnational communication barriers and have been impactful towards creating change across regions.

The example of Arab revolution bears the testimony to witness how social media became the platform for people to raise their voice against the regime and further got expanded to neighbouring countries. Arab revolution exemplifies the very notion of transcendence that cuts across boundaries and is insignificant to the concept of territory with emergence of geo-spatiality.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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