

The Power of Internet and the Security Implication for the Transformation of Political Power in the Arab Spring Crises

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Abstract:-The spread of information through internet source in the Arab Spring issues has unsalutary effects on their governments to the advantages of the masses. It made power to be more distributed with undercut monopoly of traditional bureaucracy, robbed the government of their absolute control of agendas in the crisis, and made political leaders enjoy fewer degrees of freedom before responding to events by sharing the crisis stage with more participating actors. Using Persuasive Communication Theory and Unified Theory of Acceptance in the Use of Technology as theoretical framework, this study evaluates the power of information technology with special reference to internet in the transformation of political power in the Arab Spring. It also examines the historical antecedent of the Arab Spring crisis along the factors that led to the crisis *viz a viz* the implication for the Arab spring and global security in general. It concludes that the power of internet which influenced agitation for political transformation in the Arab spring, causing political instability, agitation for regime change with enthronement of democracy could as well serve as catalyst for revolution in other climes and contexts.

I. INTRODUCTION

The new wave of internet discovery has transformed the world politics. It has also made governments all over the world to be worried on how secret and open information spread like fire. Internet as one of the keys of information dissemination has contributed immensely to information revolution, making instantaneous communication possible and giving enormous reaction to governmental activities that touch human rights, democracy and standard of living. Information Technology has always had an important impact on how human beings interact and organize their world. The role of internet in the current crises in Arab Spring makes us to understand some of the forces that shape the world in the twenty-first-century. Economic and Information network has revolutionised the political situation in the Arab spring, changing rapidly than governments with the political scales of sovereignty and authority in Arab Spring not yet grow at a similar rate. The Arab spring crisis which spread for Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and others with the antecedent history of benevolent despot of their rulers, poverty, unemployment, autocracy and legitimacy of power was facilitated by the age of wide spread information through

internet which produced some lessons about the political and social effects on Arabs spring administration.

The internet effects helped to pronounce and leak the secrets of the Arab Spring countries where totalitarian governments were combined to suppress competing sources of information through repression. In the Arab Spring crisis internet messages have the capacity to flow rapidly all over the world by watching the full episode of what were happening, central surveillance was possible with government inability to control the internet. It facilitated the spread of criticism against the Arab spring monarchies and eventually led to political instability.

II. REVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

Technological development has contributed immensely on how human beings interact and organize their world. The invention of writing in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Africa made possible the establishment of rudimentary bureaucratic state (Nye and David 2013). However, an information revolution is currently transforming world politics. Hook and Spanner (2016) quoting Bacon wrote that "knowledge is power". The current information revolution is based on rapid technological advances in computer communications and software. In the turn of the nineteenth century the industrial revolution saw the invention of steam, mill and transportation with powerful effects on economy, government and society. It also transformed pattern of production, work, living standard, social class, political power and public education. This historical antecedence enables us to understand the forces that shape the world in recent time. The advent of mass communications and broadcasting provide lessons about possible social and political effects of today. It ushered in the age of awareness, popular culture and enforcement of civil liberty. In recent time, among the communication outfits, internet creates a system in which power over information is much more widely distributed. Information revolution is making the world more complex by empowering the populace and non-state actors for better for worse with reduced control of power of the central government.

Again military power remains important in the domain of international relations. Information technology has

some impacts on the application of force that may likely benefit the small and sometimes favour the powerful military set up. In the extremely rapid technological advancement that followed among the armies there are always two major factors to be taken into consideration. The first one is the varying pace of advanced technological progress due to the new invention in industrial exploitation such as internet, high speed computer, global positioning system (GPS), Space Sensors and complex soft-wares among others which speed up revolution in military affairs (Baylis et al, 2007). David Bollier (2006) expatiating and enumerating the importance of internet opined that “the internet has been a good sent to such populations, because it enables larger numbers of geographically isolated people with shared history to organize into large virtual communities”.

Again internet enables the diasporas to present global information and ideas back home. Internet connections between foreign and local citizens had gingered crisis in Beijing against anti-Chinese riots, Indonesia in 1998, Zimbabwe in 2008, and Iran in 2009. It also crucial in the spreading of news on governmental activities in areas of election manipulation, unemployment and repression of citizen’s liberty. Chapman and Slaymakes (2002) stressing the utility of information technology in exposing governmental activities on how they rule over their citizens argued that:

industrial society has moved into an era of advanced technological innovation, affecting the way developed countries run their businesses, their institutions, and lead their lives. One of the areas in which these technological advances are dramatically influencing peoples lives is information technology and telecommunication – hence the claim that we are in the midst of digital revolution; that is driving us towards an information society.

Barry (2012) quoting the Declaration of Principles issued at the end of 2003 World Summit in Geneva and Tunis makes us to understand the commitment and the rights of citizens in acquiring knowledge, protecting their civic right and sustainable development through information technology in the following terms:

we declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive---- create access and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting sustainable development and improving their lives”.

Barry postulated further that information technology has reduced uncertainty and anxiety. The internet among others has helped to bring society together for the creation of and maintenance of virtual community. Internet has also

established network of communication between community members and outside world to improve the institutional context of their communities. All over the world, the internet allows access to new communication tools with provision of medium for discussions and exchange among various communities and organisations. This enhances their knowledge about their environment and development there in.

Expressing the geographical sphere of internet influence, Kamath (2008) opined that internet news, newspaper or news whatsoever has no geographic boundaries and seen by many as compilation of facts or events of current interest or importance to the readers. Highlighting the implication for internet news or any news, it may be said that without consciously realizing it, most people read only part of the newspaper they buy or the internet they watch. Their readings are selective and they read only what interest them. What interest most readers are internet news characterized by novelty, captivating pictures at the background expressing discontentment crime, conflict, power struggle and religious conflict. This is to attract widespread attention, interest, society determinism, mouldings public opinions for the promotion of pre-determined objectives (Chigozie 2014).

With the new revolution in information technology, Aborisade (2012) quoting Avgerou (2008:133) reiterated the history, impact and the potential of information system in the following terms:

undoubtedly, the pale and direction of information and communication technology (ICT) innovation and concomitant organizational change which comprise the object of study of Information System (IS) field, are set by the advanced countries of the World-North America and Europe. Nevertheless, the international (IS) literature includes an increasing number of studies of IS innovation experiences in other regions of the world, mainly the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Avgerou (2008) discussed further how developing countries have benefited from information and telecommunication technologies from three processes namely:

- a. A process of technology, knowledge transfer and adaptation to local social conditions
- b. A process of socially embedded actions
- c. A process of transformative techno organizational intervention associated with global politics and economics.

Highlighting how information technology such as internet was adopted among Iraq citizens it was concluded that information technology expanded the options and the reach of citizens in the war ravaged areas and enabled them to have a wider choice of action. Internet technology has enhanced mass participation of citizens in news production more than any other technology before it. Internet has

revolutionised the computer and communications world (Aborisade 2012; Leiner et. al 2003).

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Two theories are germane to this write up. They are Persuasive Communication Theory and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology. Nwanwene and Thomas (2005) opined that persuasive communication is a conscious attempt by an individual to change the behavior of others through message transmission. They also made us to understand that the decision making by individuals is central to social action in persuasion. This persuasive communication embraces society, individuals, group and the world at large. Nwanene and Thomas (2005: 23) also highlighted five stages of adopting persuasive communication:

- a. *The Awareness Stage*: This is when individuals are exposed to the information and the idea therein. This may come from printed, broadcast or internet source rather than public speaker or personal source. They opined further that although individuals lack complete information they are not motivated to seek additional information. This cannots that the awareness of idea as at that time is the centrality to their immediate reaction.
- b. *The Interest Stage*: This is the time when individuals are interested and allow themselves to receive further information for their actions.
- c. *Evaluation Stage*: This is when the receiver now evaluates the importance or the implication of such information to his life.
- d. *The Trial Stage*: The receiver now levels himself to trial with interpersonal communication.
- e. *Adoption Stage*: If the trial was persuasive and reassuring from the public or opinion leaders individual then will be persuaded to adopt the innovation.

IV. UNIFIED THEORY OF ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

This theory explains why users apply information system and the usage behavior associated with it. The theory holds that the usage behavior of information system (like internet) is predicated on four key constructs namely performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions which are direct usage intention and behavior. Again what moderates the four impact key constructs on usage intention and behavior are age, gender, experience and voluntariness of use (Venkate et al 2003). Theory of Unified Acceptance was coined form eight models by researchers to explain Information Source (IS) usage behavior such as theory of reasoned action technology acceptance model motivational model, planned behavior/technology acceptance model, model of PC utilization, innovation diffused theory and social cognitive theory. The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) was validated in a longitudinal study

and found to account for seventy percent (70%) of the variance in usage intention.

The relevance of Persuasive Communication Theory and Unified Theory of Acceptance and use of technology to this paper to understand the extent that internet news can motivate citizens to take action positively or negatively against government in power. It also raises the level of attitudinal behavior of people to what they had read or seen which can eventually persuade them into taking action. Again voluntariness of the use of internet has shaped the behavior of the masses, developed their cognitive mentality to social political issues of their environment. It is also a source of technological innovation to persuade people towards positive or negative reaction on issues that affect their civil liberties.

However, internet technology may manipulate information which may affect the political situation of war, images of civilians' casualties may be manipulated to provoke an outcry and the opponent may also manipulate situations by faking incidents in order to lay blame where it does not rightly belong. Laying too much reliance on internet to judge situation may lead to political prejudice and serious global crisis (Bodunde 2018).

V. THE ARAB SPRING CRISIS AND FACTORS RESPONSIBLE

It is an American philosophy that its new world order will bring peace and harmony to the international setting. Contrary to the view, the crisis in Arab Spring became an unprecedented issue, like that of French Revolution of 1789. The Arab crisis ushered in the challenge against old order, setting pace for political instability and demand for civil liberties and regime change. The crisis traversed from North Africa in Libya, Tunisia, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Bahran, Iran, and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) challenge in Iraq and the stalemate between political Zionism and Arab nationalism that threatened Camp David Accord of 1978 between Israel and Egypt. However, the crisis became the centre for agitation of political reform in the middle-east and North Africa. Various factors led to these revolutions. One of this is the extermination of autocracy under Islamic laws and the resurgence of democracy. The awakening of Arab democracy started in Tunisia which had been witnessing authoritarian rule under the monopoly of one party system with suppression of Arab civil liberties. Another factor is corruption and economic stagnation with large population suffered unemployment and basic necessities of live. In Egypt under President Mubarak there was mismanagement of foreign aids, brutality and chronic poverty.

In Yemen, there was discontentment on long stay in power of Ali Abdullah (Hook and Spanier 2016). In Bahran the prodemocracy activists were seeking greater representations of the majority Shitte population. In Libya, the Gaddafi's tyrannical rule sparked off riot with the assistance of NATO to oust Gaddafi from power. In Syria Assad regime met with protest of double standard by mistreating the Sunni

in favour of Alawites and autocratic rule. The insurgent was so protracted that America offered the protesters encouragement and economic aid but avoided personal intervention.

This bloody stalemate in Arab Spring also fuelled Arab nationalism against Israel. The democratic uprisings had also become an Islamic, anti-western, anti-liberal and anti-Israel wave with Iran reinforcing its nuclear ambition to assume Middle-East hegemony. Tension also escalated in 2014 between Israel and Palestine with high record of dead tolls. The seed of Arab spring uprising was sowed in to Iraq where there was a call for Islamic Caliphate between Syria and Iraq known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They called for removing oppressors from political power. Another centrality of their aims were to redraw the boundary of Middle East and the creation of social order based on Islamic laws. In Afghanistan, there was resistance against American troops that burnt Korans. It led to deadly riots by the Taliban with demand for immediate exist of American troops. This is an excuse against foreign domination. (Nye and Welch, 2013)

VI. THE INTERNET FACTOR IN THE ARAB SPRING CRISIS

There is no doubt that a fascinating use of internet had informed political transformation in the Arab Spring. The wielding of power was found in the politics of the Arab Spring. It enabled the large numbers of such geographically contiguous people to share history of autocracy, poverty, unemployment, government brutality and others with global communities. The internet also present attractive alternative ideas of democracy, civil liberties and regime change to the world. As in Tunisia, suicide committed by Bouaziz; a young street vendor as relayed through internet and allowed protesters to quickly mobilised to free willing amorphous groups rather than hierarchical organization to stage unprecedented protest (Jennifer 2003).

Again internet influence in Arab Spring became an offshoot of youth bulge theory. It sparked the youths to a sense of imagination on the insensitivity of government to the plight of youths to have a better standard of living in live, hence a mass youth bulge internet revolution. Again internet made it easier for the youth in North Africa and Middle East to see that life prospects were dramatically better for others in their age bracket with similar levels of education elsewhere (Pippa 2001). In the Arab spring, internet connectivity relaying the populists' revolt in Tunisia also snowball to other countries such as Libya, Egypt and the whole of North Africa and Middle-East. The consequence was that it fuelled discontentment and mass demonstration across the Arab spring. Again the Arab spring crisis became protracted with international focus due to the unified acceptance of the use of internet by the protesters. Internet influenced the protesters usage behavior through acceptance model, developed their social cognitive mentality and motivated them into action (Aborisade 2012).

Internet also promoted the awareness stage of the Arab Spring protesters because they were exposed to the idea of government autocracy which was the centrality of their protest. Internet engendered news participation among the citizens to fuel the Arab Spring riots. Information was relayed with under coverage all over the Arab Spring and attracted negative comments against governments which aggravated the riots to other Arabs nature. Kamath (2008) supporting the influence of internet beyond a nations geographical sphere of influence opined that internet news, newspapers or news what so ever has no geographical boundaries and seen by many as compilation of facts or events of current interest or importance to the readers.

Personal interest in internet by the protesters also added value to the Arab crisis. The masses were interested in the next event and new revolutionary thinking were promoted through internet. Chigozie (2014) also supported this assertion when he said: what interest most readers were news characterized by novelty, crime, conflict, power struggle and religion conflict. This was the more reason why the captivating suicide picture of Bouazizi in the internet was an antecedent that promoted the crisis.

In the Arab crisis the use of internet created a system where power of information is widely distributed and unrestricted under the Arabs monarchies. It made the revolution more complex for better for worse with reduced control by the government. The internet has also helped to bring the Arab Spring together to fight for the creation and maintenance of democratic society. It had also established a network of communication in the crisis between the community members and the outside world in order to improve the institutional context of the Arab Spring.

VII. THE IMPLICATION OF INTERNET FOR THE ARAB SPRING AND GLOBAL SECURITY

The first implication that the use of internet had on the Arab Spring was the political sensitisation of the Arabs' populace against the autocratic rule of their leaders which was followed by mass negative reaction of the people. It also upset the political order of the Arab Spring, causing political instability and unrest in the region. Another implication is that it facilitated regime change in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and other regions of the Arab Spring. Again it enabled the populace to profess democracy in place of monarchism and benevolent despot of the rulers. The Arabs Spring populace through internet was able to make comparative analysis of how life fair better in other world than theirs. Internet also motivated Arab Spring into action against the misrule of their governments the consequence of which many lost their lives in the cause of agitation. (Edward 2003)

It highly facilitated insurgency and terrorism in the Middle East in the proclamation of Islamic Regime of (ISIS), popularising their ideology and instilling fear on the masses through websites. Internet also exposed the myths of the Arab Spring governments to the outside world and enabled the

world to evaluate their regime in line with autocracy, democracy and civil liberties and the standard of living of the Arab Spring populace under their government. It is also a lesson that misgovernment of any regime in the world can be exposed through internet from which revolution may be imminent like the Arab Spring. Within the context of globalization, internet technology has reduced the global security and governance into microscopic scientific village where any occurrence in any nation as exposed by internet can influence other nations positively or negatively against their governments. It may also come to mind to say that the influence of internet has violated the sovereignty of all nations and their security without giving respect to their governmental activities in relation to information, socio-economic and cultural values before relating them to the world (Saskia 1998). Finally, internet had successfully made the Arab spring a focus of political instability internationally which other nations should learn lesson.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Without doubt the power of internet had influenced agitation for political transformation in the Arab Spring, causing political instability, agitation for regime change with enthronement of democracy. However internet technology has come to stay and will continue to influence the political and socio-economic development of the world negatively or positively.

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