
Social media access and participation in established democracies and authoritarian states

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Abstract

David Cameron's announcement during the 2011 riots across cities in the United Kingdom to consider shutting down social media shocked the international information community. It raised questions of how firmly entrenched intellectual freedom is in the world's established democracies, and how freedom of access to information and freedom of expression (FAIFE) organizations should respond. The social media test is used in this article to examine the standard civil liberties of 'access' and 'participation in established democracies since 2008. The method is to evaluate the use of social media in recent protests in a sample of established democracies and authoritarian regimes, and to compare differences and similarities in government responses. The article concludes with recommendations to consolidate intellectual freedom in established democracies.

Introduction

On Thursday 11 August 2011, the United Kingdom's (UK) Prime Minister David Cameron shocked the international community with a call for a clampdown on social media. He told parliament that Facebook, Twitter and Blackberry's Research in Motion (Rim) should take greater responsibility for the content posted on their networks. He went on to warn that the government would ban people from social networks who were suspected of inciting violence (Halliday and Garside 2011). A spokesperson for Facebook quickly responded by assuring the government that they had already taken measures to remove credible threats, and that millions of people across the UK used Facebook positively to let friends and family know that they were safe. More combatively, a London law firm information technology specialist argued that government emergency measures to stop protestors from communicating on social media would require legislation, and worse still that they would threaten free speech. Cameron's proposed measures would, he claimed, tilt the balance between free speech and state security toward the latter. More critically, they would render hypocritical any request by the UK to authoritarian regimes not to turn off their own networks.

This flashpoint in the UK riots raises several questions related to issues of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression (FAIFE) more generally, and to the role of social media in particular. Was Cameron's outburst the emotional response of an embattled leader trying to restore law and order? Was it an attempt to demonstrate the united resolve of a newly-elected coalition government to deal decisively with social upheaval? Did this sentiment represent just a section of parliament? The latter question is quickly answered by the support of the parliamentary opposition to rein in the social media. The shadow culture secretary was quoted as saying: "Free speech is central to our democracy but so is public safety and security. We support the government's decision to undertake a review of whether measures are necessary to prevent the abuse of social media by those who organise and participate in criminal activities" (Halliday and Garside 2011:2). Quite apart from the failure to separate criminal activities from genuine protest in this statement is the indication of solid and undivided support across party lines in the UK to curb social media (Clayton 2011; Coursey 2011). Even more worrying is that the technology to shut down social media already exists in the jamming devices that can block wireless transmissions, and they are being used in some cases (O'Doherty 2012; Howard, Agarwal, and Hussain 2011).

It becomes necessary then to question the fragility of intellectual freedom in established democracies, and their vulnerability to censorship. Without a firmly-entrenched culture of intellectual freedom, how can an established democracy claim the moral high ground when it tries to convince an authoritarian state about the perils of censorship? The widespread use of social media in protest across the world has disturbed the simple distinctions between “free” and “unfree” labels, and they are testing the strength and tenacity of intellectual freedom in established democracies just as earlier forms of communication have in the past (Howard, Agarwal, and Hussain 2011).

On the other hand, the social media test can help to shore up and consolidate intellectual freedom by identifying new forms of vigilance required to combat recent patterns of censorship. One of the ways of achieving this is to test the vulnerability of intellectual freedom by asking how similarly or differently established democracies and authoritarian states respond to social media activism. According to *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy* (2012), an established democracy is a full democracy with basic political freedoms and civil liberties that are underpinned by a democratic political culture. In full democracies, the media are independent and diverse, and there is an effective system of checks and balances with an independent judiciary. On the other hand, an authoritarian regime has no political pluralism. Many countries in this category are dictatorships. Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair and the media are either state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. Criticism of the government is repressed and censorship is pervasive.

A preliminary investigation (Dick, Oyieke, and Bothma 2012) applied the social media test to several established democracies and authoritarian states, and revealed that established democracies have not performed well in the past few years and have actually regressed in the Democracy Index rankings. The social media test profiles countries using standardized templates to identify and compare government responses of censorship to social media activism and protest. Countries are profiled, evaluated, and compared according to:

- the type of government;
- estimated number of social media users;
- Internet penetration;
- social media activism using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube;
- incidents of social media activism; and
- technical and legislative controls.

This article applies the social media test with a sharper focus on social media access and participation, which are standard civil liberties in established democracies but are less developed or non-existent in authoritarian states. Examining a smaller sample of established democracies and authoritarian states, this article concludes with ways of consolidating intellectual freedom in established democracies.

Democratic states

Political philosophers consider the term democracy to be an essentially contested term. Definitions of democracy vary depending on the social, moral or political agenda. This article applies the political definition of democracy (Lane and Ersson 2003). According to (Schmitter and Karl 1991) democracy does not consist of a single and unique set of institutions. Democracies depend upon the presence of rulers, namely persons who occupy specialized authority roles and can give legitimate commands to others. What distinguishes democratic rulers from non-democratic ones are the norms that condition how the former come to power, and the practices that hold them accountable for their actions. In a narrower sense, democratic rule encompasses the making of collective norms and choices that are binding on the society and backed by state coercion. Its content can vary a great deal across democracies, depending upon pre-existing distinctions between the public and the private, state and society, legitimate coercion and voluntary exchange, and collective needs and individual preferences.

Robert Dahl has offered the most generally accepted list of the "procedural minimal" conditions that must be present for modern a political democracy to exist (Dahl 1990). Citizens have the right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined. Citizens have the right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information should exist and be protected by law.

In a nutshell, democracy can be seen as a recipe for an acceptable set of institutions, as a way of life in which the spirit of democracy becomes as important as the peculiarities of the institutions (Crick 2002). Citizens are the most distinctive element of democracies. A citizen's right to participate actively in public life and affairs of the state is one of the marks of a democracy. All regimes have rulers and a public realm, but only to the extent that they are democratic do they have citizens. Modern democracy, in other words, offers a variety of competitive processes and channels for the expression of interests and

values collectively or individually. It is important to recognize that these do not define points along a single continuum of improving performance, but a matrix of potential combinations that are differently democratic.

Governments, whether truly democratic or not, will claim that they are democratic. However, as a historical notion, democracy does not possess the quality of absoluteness. Democracy, in its original meaning, should be understood as a way to social compromise, whose aim is to guarantee a relatively fair political life (Han and Dong 2006). Key civil liberties such as access and participation are present in established democracies and are either absent or severely diminished in authoritarian states.

Access as a civil liberty

According to Brants (1996), freedom from state interference means two things. First, that there should be no government action to prohibit a publication before it appears. Second, that it includes the individual's right of freedom of expression. This creates an obligation for democratic states to enable freedom of expression and a diversity of ideas as prerequisites for democratic discourse (Dahlberg 2011), and involves the right of access to a multiplicity of channels of communication (Brants 1996; Dahlberg 2011). The fundamental conditions for effective access are: freedom and opportunity to speak out; autonomy over media access opportunities; access to the Internet for all on equal terms; and a guarantee of continuity of the universal service performed by the telecommunications operators. Easy global access to email and social media allows politically alienated groups to communicate with like-minded or sympathetic audiences, and promotes alternative media for dissenting voices.

Participation as a civil liberty

Participation refers to involvement in the public sphere. For Habermas (1989), participation in the public sphere is necessary to foster and sustain democracy. All citizens may not take an active and equal part in politics but it must be legally possible for them to do so. The Internet offers citizens the opportunity to encounter and engage with a huge diversity of positions, thus extending the public sphere. In other words, the arenas of public discourse have become global and virtual (Dahlberg 2011). The public sphere is now more challenging to both authoritarian and democratic states. The social media are fuelling a fast-spreading dissent culture of the digital publics, which are seen as a fundamental component of social movements (Drache and Froese 2008; Dahlberg 2011). The possibility that citizens can freely get involved in these activities distinguishes

established democracies from authoritarian states. Established democracies have acquired the civil liberties of access and participation over a long period of struggle and have been stable environments for their entrenchment. These liberties also distinguish established democracies from new or flawed democracies.

Authoritarian states

Authoritarian states can be based on simple repression or be legitimised by religion, secular ideology, or tradition (Brouwer 2008). The ruler dominates the government and the state without having to share powers (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). In addition to the civil liberties of access and participation, freedom of expression, organization, and demonstration, are usually absent in authoritarian states. Electoral rights and other human rights are often abused, and in many uprisings they constitute some of the significant issues (Joseph 2011; Shirky 2011).

Autocracy is a form of authoritarianism. It may be described at one extreme as the ability of the ruler to impose his will upon his state and society (Fairbank and Goldman 2006). At its minimum, autocracy is above the law, a law unto itself, making specific laws but not controlled by them.

In China for example, autocratic rulers have displayed the following characteristics:

- Pervasiveness of the authority (the Chinese emperor had the final word in every aspect of life);
- Politicization of all aspects of life from dress to manners to books etc.; and
- Monopoly of power through refusal to allow rival authorities to emerge (Andrew & Rapp 2000).

Autocratic rulers establish supremacy by whatever means possible to protect their power. Throughout the world in the past few years there were a number of popular revolts aimed at overthrowing autocratic regimes. The absence of the democratic civil liberties of access and participation has led to their demand by thousands of citizens using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media in various countries to bring about political change. Some examples help to illustrate this development.

Under the authoritarian rule of President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijani youth activists and opposition politicians turned to the Internet and social media as a new recipe for democratization. They used social media networks to evade government control and crackdowns, and to employ the benefits of new technologies to bring much-needed change to the country. However, Azerbaijani experience shows that reality is more complex than simply equating social media and political revolution (Pearce and Kendzior 2012). Bloggers have been tracked down and arrested to serve as a deterrent to others.

Social media have also been used to expose political scandals in authoritarian regimes. It is widely held that scandals can only occur in liberal democracies (Markovits and Silverstein 1988). Examples from Russia where whistle blowers used social media to highlight corruption allegations in the police force contradict this view. In 2009 and 2010, videos uploaded on YouTube showed corruption in the police force. Both cases dealt with the sensitive topic of police misconduct and corruption, but the whistle blower later refused to cooperate (Toepfl 2011). Political scandals can be paradoxical. On the one hand, they can improve democratic accountability by generating large amounts of information. On the other hand, they may cause political alienation and rarely provide definitive resolutions. Some of these contradictions can be better understood within the larger context of the dynamics of Internet censorship.

Internet censorship

On 15th February 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton gave a speech entitled “Internet Rights and Wrongs: Choices & Challenges in a Networked World”. She reaffirmed America’s commitment to “Internet freedom” as an increasingly vital element of its foreign policy (Clinton 2011). In her words, Internet freedom is “about ensuring that the Internet remains a space where activities of all kinds can take place, from grand, ground-breaking, historic campaigns to the small, ordinary acts that people engage in every day.” Simply put, the Internet is essential to the exercise of free speech and civil liberties in a networked society (Sinnreich, Graham, and Trammell 2011). Recent political developments around the world support this argument. Although the Internet has been a platform for political speech and social action virtually since its inception, digital communications platforms have become an increasingly central component of resistance movements and other organized social action over the past five years. Consequently, it is an increasingly popular target for repression, censorship, and surveillance (Obar, Zube, and Lampe 2011; Makdisi and Elbadawi 2011; Christensen 2011; Talbot 2010; Sen et al.

2010; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Hanson et al. 2010; Freelon 2010; Davis 2010).

As Clinton herself observed, social and mobile media were important tools for both organizing and publicizing the massive anti-regime protests in Iran in 2009 and Egypt in 2011, which led to government-imposed Internet shutdowns in both cases, and contributed to the ousting of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak. The list of examples is long and includes countries ranging from China to Tunisia to Myanmar, where political resistance and repression have moved from streets and cafés to mobile phones and laptops. Governments have devoted ever-increasing resources to control and police the flow of digital communications within and outside of their borders (Sinnreich, Graham, and Trammell 2011).

Progressive use of the Internet includes the dissemination of documents, software that can be downloaded, and information about potential resources, events, and problems pertaining to action. Countless groups use the social media landscape for their own political interests and agendas. For activists in the developing world, the Internet allows affordable access to sympathetic counterparts abroad without the need to obtain a visa. The Internet has transformed from a system oriented towards information provision into one oriented towards communication, user-generated content, data sharing, and community building (Fuchs 2011). It has replaced the twentieth century media model of few producers speaking to the masses with a user-generated model of many producers speaking to each other (Fish 2009).

In this way, it connects people, easily provides information on social issues, and generates personalized and more detailed news. These features have given citizens the capacity to initiate national debates. Some governments are wary of the sheer quantity of content generated by the American infotainment machine. They argue that freedom of expression is an unaffordable luxury. Singapore, for example, imposed strict restraints on Internet sites with political, religious, or pornographic content (Rodan 1998). It also requires all local Internet access providers to be registered and to screen out 'objectionable' content. The country's Minister of Information and Threats, George Yeo, defended censorship as a symbolic way to maintain awareness of what is socially acceptable (Rodan 1998).

But Internet censorship raises special problems for democracies that have not developed mature traditions to protect political expression. In established democracies such as the USA, the protections originally afforded to print

journalism and more basic forms of expression have been extended to the Internet, although there are still restrictions. The Council of Europe has banned online hate speech, but subversive and political expression are vigorously protected (Fish 2009). The Internet's democratizing potential has been lauded for its impact on social movements and the public sphere (Zhao 2006). The 'Battle of Seattle' in 1999 (Shah 2001) and the Arab uprisings in 2011 (Casilli and Tubaro 2011; Cottle 2011; Joseph 2011; Sadiki 2000) are examples that illustrate how the Internet shapes social movements, and organizes them. The Arab uprisings have since been referred to as the Twitter and Facebook revolutions resulting from social media activism, which deserves closer examination.

Social media activism

The social media landscape is a form of citizens' democracy involving the political right of freedom of access to information and the exchange of information. The social media landscape entails platforms such as microblogs, Livecasts, and other variants of social networks. Recent events in Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen, and in other locations such as Moldova, Georgia, Palestine, and China have stimulated discussions on the uses of social media for the purposes of political dissent and activist organization, as well as their effects on democratic and authoritarian states (Christensen 2011).

Social media such as Twitter and Facebook, operating with user-created content, have become dominant and popular (Forrestal 2011; Fuchs 2011; Ho 2010; Shippert 2009). Ordinary citizens can direct public debate by putting text or video on any of the social media platforms hoping that their contribution catches the attention of the Internet masses. The social media are used in many social movements across the globe. Authoritarian states can no longer guarantee a 'safe' environment by controlling the newspapers, radio and television stations because the social media are beyond their control and manipulation (Abbott 2001). Even in countries with extreme control measures such as Iran and China, citizens have managed to use social media to highlight important issues and events.

Democracy in social media is apparent through the concept of Tactical Media (TM). TM involves the critical use and theorisation of media practices that draw on all forms of media for achieving specific goals and promoting potentially subversive issues. TM is about diverse responses to changing contexts (Coyer, Downumt, and Fountain 2007; Meikle 2002; Renzi 2008). It emerged in 1992

and emphasizes the use of new technologies (Meikle 2002). TM manifests in social media platforms including microblogs such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

Microblogs

Microblogs are social networking platforms that focus on data sharing, communication, community, and co-production (Aharony 2010; Drache and Froese 2008). Recent trends in microblogs indicate that a blog is created every minute. Bloggers are referred to as ‘citizen journalists’ who engage in the collective production of information that is shared through microblogs such as Facebook and Twitter (Aharony 2010).

Citizens in both democratic and authoritarian states use microblogs. In authoritarian states, microblogs link activist communities engaging in public debates in global settings. Hence, ‘global citizens’ can be found on Twitter or Facebook, using the Internet as the tool with which to communicate (Drache and Froese 2008). For some, global citizenship is a state of mind, but for others it is about the political and social activism of loose-knit coalitions representing global participatory democracy (Schattle, 2008). Joining public activism is easy since there is no membership requirement other than to lend your voice to what you believe in. Democratic states rely on dissent to encourage understanding and productive disagreement in order to renew and strengthen democratic values (Drache and Froese 2008).

Twitter

Twitter, which is the most popular microblogging service, was launched on 13 July 2006 and has grown significantly since its launch (Java et al. 2007). One in five Internet users now use Twitter. According to the Pew Internet Report (2012), thirteen percent of online adults use Twitter, and half of Twitter’s users access the service on a cell phone. Twitter allows its users to disseminate whatever information they please to the whole world through instant publication (Han 2011). Twitter users can post short updates online (up to 140 characters for each post, including spaces). To use Twitter, one opens an account free-of-charge. Other people may follow your content to see your posts. Twitter posts are known as tweets. Accounts can be made public or private (Forrestal 2011; Fox, Zickuhr, and Smith 2009; Zhao and Rosson 2009).

Twitter's potential value for any community is that it acts as a starting point for wider conversation because it sparks interaction. In the social media landscape, Twitter has been used to highlight and track important events in authoritarian states. In the case of Iran's fraudulent presidential elections in June 2009, the 'supreme leader' blacked out media reporting, and all cell phones and other communication channels were blocked. The Iranian authorities used Twitter to propagate misleading information, forgetting that every tweet is checked for accuracy. The misleading information was discovered and denounced by Twitter (Levinson 2009). American presidential candidates John Edwards and Barack Obama integrated Twitter into their campaigns in 2008 (Aharony 2010). Both used the platform to keep their Twitter followers abreast of their upcoming appearances. News organizations such as the BBC and CNN also use Twitter to share breaking stories.

Twitter is invaluable for creating social networks in authoritarian states, but it has also been responsible for reporting events and breaking news for the purposes of dissent in democratic states (Han 2011).

Facebook

Facebook allows global citizens to broadcast to all their friends that they support a certain political idea or social cause. Most cell phone users connect to Facebook at their own discretion. According to Levinson (2009), Facebook friends are real-time knowledge resources and offer valuable information.

The power of Facebook campaigns is evident in the street protests that rocked Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, Bahrain, Libya, and many Arab countries. In Egypt, it was a Facebook-driven protest on 25 January 2011 that grew into a massive mobilization of protesters and that forced President Hosni Mubarak from office (Christensen 2011; Lynch 2011). The Arab uprisings have overturned established views of authoritarian tenacity and the resilience of Arab authoritarian states.

YouTube

The power of YouTube manifests in both established democracies and authoritarian states. YouTube relies on millions of video clips in real-time about otherwise untold stories. Amateur video clips are able to depict the power of individuals. 'Global citizens' have used mobile technology to upload pictures/images of undemocratic events onto YouTube. The public has become

aware of YouTube as a resource for democracy. In some instances, YouTube has usurped television's role as a herald of public news through real-time and instant updates of events as they unfold. Television cannot capture many significant events that happen, but 'global citizens' have made it possible for such events to be viewed on YouTube. YouTube is not only continuously accessible and free to users, but it is also free to producers.

In spite of government efforts to silence dissent, some YouTube images have evoked mixed reactions from 'global citizens'. Examples of dramatic images include:

- The Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse in Iraq 2004, showing photographs taken by a US Army reservist. He was among eleven military officers who were court-martialed:
- Saddam Hussein's execution which was not supposed to be a public event; and A video clip of George Allen (a US senator who lost his re-election bid in 2008) calling a questioner at a public event "macaca", which is a racial nickname (Levinson 2009).

More positively, in June 2007 YouTube was used to popularize the American presidential candidate Barack Obama through the video "Obama Girl". It received more than 2.3 million viewers in its premier month, and Obama went on to win the US presidential elections (Levinson 2009).

It is apparent from all the examples listed so far in this article that ordinary citizens have used the social media to become more directly involved in fighting Internet censorship, and have tested their effects in established democracies and authoritarian regimes. There is a compelling reason to delve more deeply into the track records of these states to ascertain how well-insulated against Internet censorship and how firmly entrenched intellectual freedom is in established democracies where the civil liberties of access and participation are standard features. In other words, the social media test requires a more rigorous application in established democracies. One way to achieve this is through a sharp and sustained comparison of established democracies with authoritarian regimes, with respect to access and participation.

Methodology

Four countries across the democratic-authoritarian continuum are profiled in individual templates in respect of incidences of censorship affecting citizens' social media access and participation. The countries are located in Africa (Libya), Asia (China), Europe (UK), and North America (the USA). They represent both established democracies and authoritarian regimes but because there are differences within these two broad categories, the identification of the type of government and ranking is drawn from *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy*.

Full democracies are countries with basic political freedoms and civil liberties that are underpinned by a democratic political culture. In full democracies, the media are independent and diverse, and there is an effective system of checks and balances with an independent judiciary. The UK and USA, which represent full (and therefore established) democracies, are included in this investigation.

Authoritarian regimes have no political pluralism. Many countries in this category are dictatorships. Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair and the media are either state owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. Criticism of the government is repressed and censorship is pervasive. China and Libya represent authoritarian regimes and are included in this investigation.

Each country is described in terms of population size in 2012, the estimated number of social media users in 2012, and Internet penetration in 2012 to show the most recent use of social media by ordinary citizens. Social media tools including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were selected because of their widespread use by citizens during protests and social unrest, and because they have been the main targets for government clampdowns on the social media. Incidences affecting social media access and participation are listed for each country, and have been drawn primarily (but not exclusively) from the following sources:

- Reporters Without Borders;
- Open Net Initiative;
- Freedom of Connection, Freedom of Expression;
- Global Voices Online;
- Pew Internet.org; and
- The Guardian.

Using the sources above, as well as other internet sources, data mining is used to gather and analyse the information from different sources (Bramer 2007). A keyword search was applied to Internet sites and published reports on social media censorship. The categorization of social media access and participation as civil liberties is derived from the *Democracy Index Ranking 2011/2012*. The four states are ranked as follows in the table below (Democracy Index Ranking 2011/2012):

Country	Rank	Civil Liberties
UK	18	9.12
USA	19	8.53
Libya	125	5.29
China	141	1.18

The table above shows the democracy index world ranking of the four countries for 2011/2012. The UK is ranked highest at 18, followed by the USA at 19. Libya is ranked at 125, and China at 141. The total number of independent states in the table is 167. The table also shows the civil liberties ranking on a scale of 0-10. The civil liberties ranking indicates that the UK scores 9.12 and the USA scores 8.53. Libya scores 5.29 while China scores 1.18. Social media access and participation as civil liberties imply that citizens experience the following:

- Free access to social media;
- Freedom of expression and non-violent protests;
- Open and free discussion of public issues;
- Reasonable diversity of ideas; and
- No political restrictions to access the Internet.

Types of Internet censorship and techniques used to prevent access and participation on social media include: monitoring; surveillance; blocking; filtering; DNS tampering; and modifying web content. The data presented in four separate tables identify incidences affecting social media access and participation between 2008 and 2012 in the four countries (The incidences are listed in chronological order to track emerging patterns of action and reaction implicating social media access and participation by citizens and governments.

The list of incidences is not comprehensive, but it does provide a clear overview of tendencies in the targeted countries.

Discussion

Social media access and participation are discussed by first identifying some key techniques and methods of censorship in the authoritarian states and established democracies, and then reviewing the implications for these civil liberties in established democracies.

Social media access in authoritarian states

China

The data indicate the use of technical control. Incidences of access censorship reveal techniques and methods such as blocking and unblocking of the various Internet channels, Facebook, Technorati, Word Press, *et cetera*. Other incidences include:

- Frequent Twitter and Facebook blocking because the Chinese government is afraid of free discussion among its citizens (blocking);
- The government monitors and deletes certain information, but the data show that social media activists resist and undermine censorship. While censorship may be pervasive, social media activism is becoming equally pervasive (modifying web content);
- Only the China-specific micro-blogging websites such as WEIBO can be used for easy control (surveillance); and
- China still uses the well-tested tactic of suspending communications in cities or provinces when it loses control of the situation, as happened recently in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia (blocking).

Libya

Data indicate the use of technical control, including:

- Incidences of Internet crackdowns in times of civil unrests (shutdown); and
- Before his removal and death, Gaddafi tried to impose a news blackout by preventing access to the Internet (blocking).

Social media access in established democracies

USA

The following emerges from the data:

- Trends include legislative control, e.g. PIPA (Protect Intellectual Property Act-2011 under deliberation) and SOPA, or the Stop Online Piracy Act (legislative);
- A report on a legal battle between employees and their employers over work policies that prohibit them from discussing any work related matters on social media. (Legislative);
- The shut-down of cellular services to curb protesters using the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) train at the Civic Center station in San Francisco carried signs with comments such as “I believe in free speech,” “Stop police brutality,” and “Protect Free Speech.” Protesters were expected to rely heavily on smart phones to organize a rally via social media (crackdown); and
- Incidents of Twitter crackdowns on college athletes in various colleges in the USA. College athletics coaches in some cases banned the use of social media among team members (surveillance).

UK

The data shows that:

- The UK government passed an Internet censorship and disconnection law to censor websites deemed "likely to be used for or in connection with an activity that infringes copyright". This law can be used to disconnect the Internet connection of any household in the UK (legislative);
- David Cameron recommended a social media crackdown after rioters in the UK used Facebook and Twitter to organize large-scale lootings and demonstrations (shutdown); and
- During the London 2012 Olympics athletes united in an online rebellion against a social media clampdown which banned them from posting pictures or thanking their sponsors (clampdown).

Social media participation in authoritarian states

China

From the data there are incidences where:

- Participation was allowed under certain conditions (monitoring);
- Individuals were allowed to write blogs on social issues, including some on political issues. However, the government monitors everything that is blogged (monitoring);
- Media is controlled by the “Propaganda Department”, which filters information or reports about social-political occurrences/events (filtering);
- Blocking of search engines, namely Google, Technorati, Wretch, Blogspot, keywords, and image sites (blocking);
- Shut-down of websites. In 2010 alone China blocked almost 1.3 million websites, and sites could not obtain a domain name .cn (shutdown);
- Recent reports of Internet hacking by the Chinese Government (hacking); and
- Internet crackdowns, especially during the 2011 civil unrests in Mongolia (political and technical).

Libya

The data disclose unrelenting censorship in incidences such as:

- Arrests of participants mobilizing protests – for example, the blogger Mohammed Al-Ashim Masmari (political);
- Arrests of citizens giving interviews on television (political);
- Internet crackdowns during uprisings with political undertones (shutdown);
- An airstrike that led to the destruction of satellite links of the major broadcasting house, Al-Jamahiriya (shutdown); and
- Jamming telephone communication for both landlines and mobile networks (shutdown).

Social media participation in established democracies

UK

Interference with social media participation can be seen in incidences where:

- Politicians blamed Twitter for the organization of the 2011 London riots that led to a media crackdown (blocking); and
- New technology was introduced to detect messages that could lead to a repeat of the London Riots 2011 (monitoring).

USA

The data reveal incidences where:

- Government sought veto power over new domain names (filtering);
- Government introduced legislation, including PIPA and SOPA to weaken civil liberties (legislature);
- Police used twitter to incriminate citizens (political); and
- 200 citizens who mobilized via Twitter to demonstrate against a G-20 summit gathering in Pittsburg in 2009 were arrested (political).

The evidence shows that all four countries exercise social media censorship, but what is worrying is how the standard civil liberties of ‘access’ and ‘participation’ in established democracies have been compromised as a result. The governments of both established democracies and authoritarian states have attempted to curb the ‘misuse’ of social media by social movements. In doing so they used similar techniques to restrict ‘access’, namely blocking, surveillance, and shutdown. Where they diverge is that authoritarian states tend to modify web content whereas established democracies use legislation. The techniques used to censor ‘participation’ are also similar in both authoritarian states and established democracies. They include monitoring, filtering, blocking, and political control through arrests.

The distinctions between ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ labels in the use of social media are testing the strength, and tenacity of intellectual freedom in established democracies. Recent steps to censor or shut down the social media will reflect poorly on the moral standing of established democracies that advise authoritarian regimes not to do so. Worse still is that the oppressive political climate emerging threatens to undermine the status of established democracies, and could drive them further down the Democracy Index rankings in the future.

Conclusion

With a view to consolidating intellectual freedom in established democracies, the following actions are recommended:

- Conduct the social media test regionally and globally every five years;
- Strengthen the International Federation of Library Associations' (IFLA) freedom of access to information and freedom of expression programme by adding Internet censorship as a special focus of its FAIFE committee;
- Call on all library associations to join Internet freedom bodies in fighting attempts to shut down social media in their countries and worldwide;
- Monitor attempts to undermine civil liberties in established democracies.

The censorship assault on social media 'access' and 'participation' in the past five years not only bodes ill for civil liberties in established democracies. It puts at risk the global struggle for intellectual freedom.

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