

IS SOCIAL MEDIA A REFORM ADVOCATE?: AN ANALYSIS USING THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract

The world is becoming increasingly connected through the power of the Internet. The creation of websites was an innovative advancement in technology that has afforded information and communication technologies (ICTs) special recognition as a means to improve people's lives. Such technology has brought to life what are known as social networking services. These services, better known as social media, are increasingly attracting the attention of both the public and academic researchers intrigued by their utilization and reach. On 26 August 2013, the Filipino people made history by using social media to organize the "Million People March", a protest calling for the abolition of the pork barrel government system and for the prosecution of those that abused it. The "Occupy Wall Street" movement of 2011, known for non-violent protest of the growing income disparity and economic inequality attributed to Wall Street's corporate executives, was organized on social media and carried out in New York City. In the same year, the democratic uprising known as the "Arab Spring" highlighted the effective use of social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness of State attempts at repression and Internet censorship. An increasing number of studies are examining these phenomena, however comparative studies of the results of these events remains limited. In an attempt to fill this gap, this study focuses on the success and the outcomes of these movements that made use of social media. This paper will shed light on the role of social media in advocating for governmental reforms.

Keywords: Social Media, Reform, ICT, Inequality, Protest

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is defined as computer-mediated tools that allow people to create, share, or exchange information, ideas, and pictures/ videos in virtual communities and networks (Kaplan, 2010). In this paper, the term “social networking sites” and “social media” will have the same meaning and may be used interchangeably.

When Facebook, in partnership with six other companies (Samsung, Ericsson, MediaTek, Opera Software, Nokia and Qualcomm), launched “Internet.org” even the most remote parts of society gained access to the World Wide Web. This demonstrates how technology has evolved to connect people with each other much easier than it was to do so ten or twenty years ago.

What is social media capable of?

On 26 August 2013, the Filipino people made history through the use of social media to organize a protest that shook the government, called the “Million People March”. The demands to abolish the pork barrel system and prosecute those guilty of corruption were acted upon almost immediately by the government.

Prior to that, the “Occupy Wall Street” movement of 2011, known for non-violent protest of the growing income disparity and economic inequality attributed to Wall Street’s corporate executives in , was organized on social media and carried out in New York City. However, this protest did not succeed.

A similar event in 2011 known as the “Arab Spring” demonstrated the effective use of social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness of State attempts at repression and Internet censorship. By the end of February 2012, government leaders had been forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen; civil uprisings had erupted in Bahrain and Syria; major protests had broken out in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Sudan; and minor protests had occurred in Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Western Sahara, and Palestine.

While an increasing number of studies examine the phenomena of “Occupy Wall Street” and the “Arab Spring”, the number of studies comparing the results of these events remains limited. In an attempt to fill this gap, this study focuses on the successes and failures of movements that made use of social media.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main question this research seeks to address is: *what is the role of social media in advocating reforms?* This study will compare and contrast the “Million People March” in the Philippines with “Occupy Wall Street” in New York City. The study will use the lens of development administration, applying the rights-based approach (RBA). The analysis of this study will be guided by the indicators adopted from the UNDP’s “Indicators for Human Rights Based Approaches to Development in UNDP Programming: A Users’ Guide” (2006).

This study takes readers on a journey through the highlights of the two events, explaining how social media brought them to life. It will include the works of Gitlin (2012), and Clark (2012) to provide details of “Occupy Wall Street”. Additionally, secondary data in the form of reports on the “Million People March” will be utilized to develop the readers’ understanding of the event.

With the discussion of each event’s principles, elements, and its evolution, this study adopts the RBA to Development framework. The author will examine the dynamics of the RBA, as well as the results of the two events.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 *The Occupy Wall Street Movement*

Since men are not angels, then government is necessary to keep society from falling into lawlessness (James Madison, 1788). Todd Gitlin, in his book “Occupy Nation—The Roots, The Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street”, examines the ideology and the future of the Occupy Movement, which has spawned similar non-violent demonstrations worldwide.

On 17 September 2011 a number of Americans gathered in Zuccotti Park, located in New York City’s Wall Street financial district, to begin their non-violent protest against the growing income disparity and economic inequality attributed to Wall Street’s corporate executives. The so-called “Occupiers”, catalyzed by the call to protest on social media, were mostly young and unemployed, as they were the ones that could allocate the most

time to stay in the encampment. They claimed to represent the 99 percent of the population who are victims of the government’s failure to curb America’s corporate greed. The reforms demanded by the movement were: participatory society; restoring the Glass-Steagall Act, a law passed after the Great Depression in the 1930s which prevented different financial institutions from merging their services; taxing Wall Street transactions; and ending Federal and public funding of election campaigns. The movement was inspired by the Arab Spring protests that had recently swept almost the entire North African region and led to the end of their authoritarian regimes.

Sociologist Alex Vitale characterized the Occupy movement as having a defiant style of non-violence. Their defiance was shown in exercising their right to occupy a public place to peacefully assemble. The movement was led by radicals who are deeply analytical, anti-capitalist, and non-violent. They were seeking a world run not by exclusive committees, but by assemblies of people. Unlike other protest movements, the Occupy movement did not have a visible organization that claimed primary responsibility for pushing these reforms. The participants and organizers instead reiterated that their group drew strength from the *leaderless coordination* of their movement. They prefer a participatory, horizontal, working-group style of organization because for them, vertical organization is representative of colonialism. However, Todd Gitlin further stressed that even if the movement refused to designate a leader, leadership was not necessarily absent altogether.

Gitlin further states that the main problem of leaderless coordination of the movement is that it rejects the formalities and informalities of accountability, which could lead to uncontrollably deviant behavior in some members. This could explain the riot amongst the protesters in Oakland and the harassment of women in some of the encampments.

The author believes that the Occupiers and other supporters of the movement will continue to communicate their advocacy on social media and remain actively involved in discussions addressing issues on income inequality and corporate influence on government policies. The movement will retain its leaderless coordination because the core of the movement is based on equal access to freedom of expression, regardless of position. It will continue to abstain from electoral politics because Occupiers do not want their advocacy to be misused by politicians seeking to further their own agenda. As pressure from this movement is ongoing, one of the demanded reforms that may be achieved is the re-establishment of the Glass-Steagall Act, or a law similar to it.

3.2 Social Media and Social Movement

In his work on Occupy Wall Street, Eric Clark (2012) noted that social media can certainly be used as a catalyst for change and to influence public opinion in the context of social movements. Today's prominent social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, have the ability to generate awareness and publicity for causes and their messages. Clark's focal point is on further analysis of the role that social media has inherited in the world's mediated societal movements and

the relationship between these two factors. There is certainly a shift occurring from the earlier dominance of traditional media outlets to more modern media outlets, including social media, though this is not yet a complete transformation by any means.

Clark added that traditional media sources were not the first to pick up on social movements, nor did they believe that Occupy Wall Street had the ability to turn into the phenomenon that it did in Zucotti Park, New York City between September and November 2011. He explains that the coverage of this social movement by traditional media newsrooms serves as a lesson on understanding the position that social media has taken in modern information dissemination. Furthermore, it would not make sense to further distance traditional media from a public sphere that is increasingly reliant on social media platforms for the majority of their news. As social media platforms continue to become more embedded in our daily life, the ways in which they provide coverage of our world, and the accompanying technology that caters to these platforms, will remain dominant. Social media can now be considered as people's primary media source.

3.3 The Million People March

A protest movement similar to Occupy Wall Street happened in the Philippines on 26 August 2013. It was called the Million People March and was the first in a series of protests calling for the total abolition of the pork barrel fund. This leaderless rally of indignation was also initiated by the call of one concerned citizen on her Facebook page. Triggered by public anger over a scam, the protest

was organized at Luneta Park in Manila, as well as other cities nationwide and even overseas. Some media commentators considered this as “the first ever massive rally in the Philippines called and organized mostly through social media channels”.

The Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF, popularly known as pork barrel) Scam, involving the alleged misuse of such funds by several members of the Philippines Senate and Congress, was the cause for protest. The issue sparked serious discussion threads that began trending online. PDAF is a lump-sum discretionary fund granted to each member of Congress for spending on priority development projects of the Philippine government. It is estimated that the Philippine government was defrauded of some ₱10 billion throughout the course of the scam from 2003 to 2013. To carry out an anomaly of this magnitude, a network of accomplices were involved including legislators, national government agency officials, local executives, and the private sector. The scam provoked public outrage demanding for the abolition of the PDAF. The call to protest was facilitated through social media, organized peacefully with citizen participation, and eventually resulted in the abolition of PDAF.

3.4 How The Event Was Organized through Social Media?

A Facebook page entitled “Abolish Pork Barrel” was created by Arnold Pedrigal and Bernardo Bernardo of the “Power ng Pinoy” Facebook page inviting participants to the protests (Presse, 2013). This call originated from Ito Rapadas’ original Facebook status post about protesting the pork barrel scam, stating:

“What we need is a MILLION PEOPLE MARCH by struggling Filipino taxpayers. A day of protest by the silent majority that would demand all politicians and government officials (whatever the political stripes, color they may carry) to stop pocketing our taxes borne out from our hard work by means of these pork barrel scams and other creative criminal acts.”

Peachy Rallonza - Bretaña, an advertising executive and friend of Rapadas, reposted it as a call to action with the addition of a date and location: Luneta Park, August 26 (National Heroes’ Day). Ms. Rallonza-Bretaña, one of the coordinators, explained that there is *no main group that leads the protest* and described it as “snowballing at great speed”. On the eve of the protests, people from various groups had already arrived in Luneta Park. Although people were asked to dress in white, they were also encouraged to wear any color they wanted to in an effort to reflect the protest’s inclusive, non-partisan, and decentralized nature. On the day of the protest itself, the hashtags used by the coordinating group, #Million People March and #Scrap Pork, were reportedly trending in first place in the Philippines, demonstrating widespread support for the cause through both online and in-person participation.

The protest directed clear demands at the government including the abolition of the pork barrel system, accountability for all misused funds, and the prosecution of those guilty of corruption. The leaderless protest only lasted for a day but sparked a series of demonstrations nationwide. The government acted almost immediately on

their demands, leading to the abolition of the pork barrel fund.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Theoretical Framework: The Rights-Based Approach (RBA) to Development

The rights-based approach (RBA) is a framework that equates development to the realization of all human rights for all (EQUITAS, 2014). It is based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to the promotion and protection of human rights. It views development from a human and socio-economic focused perspective, prioritizing the rights and dignity of the most marginalized populations, aiming to catalyze a fundamental shift in the power relationship between duty-bearers and rights - holders. The RBA further emphasizes that the process, not just the result, matters. Assumed in this approach is the fact that every human being is inherently a **rights-holder** who should enjoy guaranteed, universal human rights. Through ratification of the different United Nations human rights treaties, States automatically assume the principal role of guaranteeing these rights (i.e. to respect, protect, and fulfill), or, according to the HRBA language, States become the principal **duty-bearers**. There are also other non-State entities, such as civil society organizations, that have the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of people.

RBA upholds the following principles: direct links to human rights, participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, and empowerment.

(1) Direct links to human rights: The goal of RBA is to use human rights standards as the foundation for all development work in all sectors and in all phases of programming, from planning to implementation, with the intention of promoting human rights and human dignity for all.

(2) Participation: RBA creates channels for the participation of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including poor and disadvantaged people, minorities, indigenous peoples, women, children, and youth. RBA promotes active, meaningful, and continuous voluntary participation; further stressing that the development of capacities for participation is an important result in itself.

(3) Accountability: RBA demands that duty-bearers be identified and held accountable for the violation or neglect of human rights. In this sense, one of the fundamental contributions of RBA is the emphasis it places on challenging the power imbalance between duty - bearers and rights - holders.

(4) Non-discrimination and equality: RBA pays particular attention to non-discrimination and equality for marginalized groups (which may include women, minorities, indigenous peoples, prisoners, and the poor). An RBA requires that the question of who is marginalized be answered locally. From this perspective, people are not seen as beneficiaries, but as rights-holders.

(5) Empowerment: RBA aims to give rights-holders the capacity and the power to claim their human rights and hold duty-bearers accountable. (UNDP, 2005)

The overall responsibility for meeting human rights obligations rests with the State. This responsibility includes

all State departments such as parliaments, ministries, local authorities, judges and justice authorities, police, and teachers. All of these State representatives are legal duty-bearers.

Every rights-holder has the responsibility to respect the rights of others. At the same time, a rights-holder is entitled to claim their rights and to hold the duty-bearer accountable. In this sense, it can be said that every individual or institution that has the power to affect the lives of rights-holders is a *moral* duty-bearer – the greater the power, the larger the obligation to fulfill, especially in the respect and protection of others' human rights. Therefore, private companies, local leaders, civil society organizations, international organizations, heads of households, parents, and, in principle, every individual can be considered as moral duty-bearers. It should be emphasized that the State as a *legal* duty-bearer also has a duty to regulate the actions of *moral* duty-bearers – e.g. parents, companies, etc. – to ensure that they are respecting human rights (Danish Institute of Human Rights, 2007).

Human rights include both the freedom of action and entitlement to goods, services, institutions, and resources necessary for a life of dignity. Entitlements are implicit in human rights and better identified through the normative elements of each human right. Generally speaking, normative elements include: availability, physical accessibility, economic accessibility, information accessibility, quality, safety, and cultural acceptability. It is important to note that entitlements vary depending upon the normative content of the right.

4.2 Indicators: The Lens of the RBA to Development

There are three types of indicators presented by the UNDP (2006). These are rights in principle, rights in practice, and official statistics.

(1) Human Rights in Principle, UNDP (2006)

In many ways, the indicators for human rights in principle are the simplest forms of measurement since the sources of data are well known, publicly available, relatively easy to code, and are, arguably, the most objective. Indicators that measure human rights in principle are suitable for providing background information on the formal commitments that countries have made to the protection of human rights. This includes the policies and laws set by the State's governing body.

(2) Human Rights in Practice, UNDP (2006)

Human rights in practice are those rights actually enjoyed and exercised by groups and individuals regardless of the formal commitment made by a government. The increased awareness of human rights as a social issue, combined with organizations dedicated to documenting human rights violations, has led to a greater availability of comprehensive information on States' actual practices and the conditions under which individuals live.

(3) Official Statistics, UNDP (2006)

Official statistics are those that official agencies collect at national and sub-national levels based on standardized (international or national) definitions and methodologies. In some cases, governments collect information following standardized methodologies that are directly relevant for human rights assessments.

Having outlined the foundations of RBA above, this study will start with analysis of the context by identifying which rights were violated and which rights were exercised in the two events. The identification of the rights-holders and duty - bearers will follow. Next is a discussion of the capacity of rights-holders and duty-bearers utilizing the indicators provided by the UNDP (2006). This will be followed by the conclusion.

5. RESULTS OF THE STUDY: THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1 Context Analysis

While the motivations behind Occupy Wall Street movement are numerous, one that stands out is that citizens had become fed up with social and economic inequality attributed to Wall Street's corporate executives, and the growing income disparity as a result.

5.1.1. Occupy Wall Street: Which rights were violated?

The causes of the movement were violations in themselves, including the rights to social justice, non-discrimination, equal protection of the law, participation in government, an adequate standard of living, freedom from hunger, and access to public service.

On the day of the protest basic human rights were also violated. Protesters were dragged out of their locations as a measure of dispersal employed by the local police. The rights that were violated include, but are not limited to: liberty and security of the person, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of assembly.

From an RBA perspective, the duty-bearer failed to observe its obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of the rights-holders. When the duty-bearers, those who have the greater power, fail to perform their responsibility, the rights of the rights-holders will never be realized. Thus, development is not possible. When the rights-holders cannot claim their rights, they won't be able to perform their role in society. Occupy Wall Street argued that the State has been captured by the economic elite, curbing the ability of the duty-bearers to provide for the rights-holders.

On the other hand, the Million People March made clear demands of the government t- the abolition of the pork barrel system, accountability for all misused funds, and the prosecution of those guilty of corruption.

5.1.2 Million People March: Which rights were violated?

The causes of the movement that were violations in themselves included the rights to transparency and equal access to justice.

On the day of the protest there were no violation of rights. Rather, people were free to exercise their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of assembly.

Looking at this event from the RBA perspective, the duty-bearer here also failed to observe its obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of the rights-holders. This also includes the failure to protect public funds from misuse by public officials, further depriving the rights-holders of funds intended for public goods and services. Development by the people

is then hampered as rights-holders cannot perform their role in society when public goods and services are not adequate.

5.1.3 Identifying The Rights-Holders And The Duty-Bearers

The rights-holders in the Occupy Wall Street and Million People March movements are mostly the same, the majority being middle class citizens. This is because they are the ones who pay the bulk of the taxes in order for the government to function in the fulfillment of citizens' human rights.

The duty-bearers of the Occupy Wall Street movement are the government and the corporate executives of Wall Street, while the duty-bearers of the Million People March movement are the government and the public officials.

5.2 Capacity Analysis

For both events, the rights-holders, being mostly the middle class, are aware of their rights, the laws, and relevant standards. They have the capacity to access information via social media in order to organize and facilitate such events. They also have the capacity to advocate and mobilize for their rights. These rights-holders consider themselves greatly affected by the failure of duty-bearers to perform their obligations because they are vigilant of what is going on around them. Through the use of social media, rights-holders were able to have conversations and debate online, leading to a phenomenal historical moment in the history of each of the two countries (USA and the Philippines). It is in this context that communication and organization were immensely strengthened by social media (Clark, 2012).

In the case of Occupy Wall Street, the duty-bearers, the government and the elites, are aware that they have the greater power. They have the greater obligation to fulfill, respect, and protect the human rights of others. Additionally, they have the capacity to promote development by fulfilling their obligation. Yet they fail to do so as greed overcomes duty-bearers' commitments, further impacting the rights-holders' ability to participate in society. This causes social and economic inequality and income disparity to arise.

In the Million People March, the duty-bearers are the government and the public officials. As they maintain the greater power, they are under the obligation to fulfill, respect, and protect the human rights of others. However, they failed to utilize public funds transparently and responsibly, instead giving way to corruption. When the scandal was publicized, rights-holders reacted with great dissatisfaction.

6. CONCLUSION

The two events, both lacking a designated leader, made use of social media to organize a protest on a grand scale, yet resulting in different outcomes. The Million People March, unlike Occupy Wall Street, was a success in terms of achieving the demand to abolish the pork barrel system, as the government responded almost immediately. On the other hand, while the Occupy Wall Street movement continues to spark hope among most cities in the United States (U.S.), the government remains apathetic to the demands of the Occupy Wall Street movement, leading to the continuation of rallies and protests.

Social media played an important role in the communication and organization of these events – in advocating for reform.

In the modern context, social media has become a platform for people to vent their frustrations to the public. It also provides insight to events occurring around the world, wherever access is available. The Occupy Wall Street and the Million People March movements, with similar origins, both made a historical mark on the history of the USA and the Philippines, respectively. Originating as a call to action on social media, the movements were further solidified by the number of messages, conversations, and debates surrounding each topic. These online interactions led people to gather without a leader and demonstrate their demands in the streets.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and CEO of Facebook, stated that “...connectivity is a human right”. Without social media, it is hard to say whether these movements would have happened on the scale that they did. Technological advancement has allowed for information to become readily available via social media, further facilitating the speed at which events like these can be actualized in such a short amount of time.

Social media hastens people’s demands for the right to development by empowering the rights-holders. The financial burden of coordinating a protest is not as high as it would be utilizing traditional methods of communication and organization. This allows the rights-holders to focus their resources on their demands and the event itself, rather than the

information dissemination, communication, and organization of the event.

The outcomes of the two events were dependent on two primary factors: 1) the responsiveness of the duty-bearers to the rights of the rights-holders, and 2) whether the duty-bearers believe in the principles of the rights-based approach to development.

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