

THE NEW MEDIA AND ISLAM: COMMUNICATION CHARACTERISTICS AND DYNAMICS

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Abstrak

Teknologi komunikasi mutakhir selalu memegang peranan penting dalam mencapai kemenangan pada berbagai revolusi sepanjang sejarah sejak zaman Renaissance. Dengan demikian, maka teknologi digital dan media sosial baru yang lebih hebat tentu akan merupakan faktor penentu pula dalam rangkaian revolusi “Musim Semi Arab” sejak tahun 2010 di Timur Tengah. Revolusi ini dikenal juga sebagai revolusi Facebook, Twitter atau Blogging untuk menunjukkan teknologi dan media sosial baru yang dipakai. Media sosial itu dianggap demikian hebatnya, sehingga dijadikan “model Musim Semi Arab” oleh gerakan pendudukan Wallstreet di Amerika Serikat dan negara Barat lainnya, bahkan juga di Cina. Tetapi, jikalau dinamika revolusi itu diteliti dengan lebih mendalam, maka timbul kesimpulan bahwa keberhasilan itu bukan semata-mata merupakan hasil dari media baru saja, tetapi terutama karena berbagai faktor lain. Antara lain: keterkaitan global, perang cyber, komunikasi politik, serta kepentingan asing (seperti terlihat dari penyerangan yang dilakukan pesawat tanpa awak AS terhadap Khadafi). Kendati begitu, media baru membawa banyak manfaat sosial bagi Dunia Muslim.

Kata Kunci: Musim Semi Arab, media sosial baru, revolusi komunikasi.

Abstract

The latest communication technology had always played a critical role in the success of many revolutionary actions, as have been shown ever since the 15th Century’s European Renaissance. It was to be expected, therefore, that the use of powerful digital technology and the new social media, would be even more decisive in achieving victory in the latest string of revolutions and mass protest movements. This was known as the Arab Spring due to its success to toppled the authoritarian regimes of the Middle Eastern Muslim region, but also as the Facebook, the Twitter, or the Blogging revolutions to indicate the main social media and technology in use. The social media was considered so powerful as an instrument of protest that the “Arab Spring model” was adopted by the Occupy movements in the US and elsewhere in the Western world, also in China. An examination of the dynamics that come into play in the revolutions, however, conclude that the success are not may not be the results of the new media only but also of other factors: global links, cyber warfare, political communication, foreign interests (e.g. US drones attack against Khadafi) Nevertheless, it bring real social advantages for the Muslim world.

Keywords: Arab Spring, new social media, communication revolutions.

Introduction

The Arab Spring phenomenon, the chain of resistance movements which began with the

successful Tunisian uprising in December 2010 and proliferated to similar type of revolts in Egypt, Libya and other Arab nations, have raised

the awareness on the political impact of the new, social, communications media – not only in Muslim countries but also in other parts of the world. Especially in the Western civil society movements, many have become so convinced with the strength of the new media as to believe that to liberate any society from a non-democratic government, it is sufficient to “just give them the Internet”¹ and they will be able to oppose a state power structure or overthrow a powerful regime. This notion is popularized by international mass communication media which easily call every resistance, actions or uprisings as a “revolution” of the dominant new media format being used at that time – regardless of the scope and intensity of the political event. Thus, there was the time for the “Blogging revolution”, the “Twitter revolution”, and the “Facebook revolution”.²

Actually, the latest communication technology device had always been claimed to be playing a critical role in many revolutionary actions even before the new social media era or the Arab Spring. In the 1986 Philippine People’s Power revolution, for example, the credits went to mobile handy-talkies; in the 1992 Thai “middle-class revolution”, it was the portable telephones, for its mobile ability in coordinating surprise actions without being detected by security forces. But the ultimate proof of a new technology potential before the era of the new media was the 2001 “SMS Revolution” in the Philippines: within a few hours after the first message was sent, 700,000 demonstrators were mobilized to gather at EDSA from the various corners of metropolitan area of Manila, and successfully demanded the resignation of president Joseph Estrada.³

The role of new communication technology invention and its related media to induce dramatic political change or to overthrow the authority in power, had been recognized even much longer in the history of states and religions. One of the well known evidence was the impact of Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the movable type printing technology in 1440, which replaced the manual hand writing method

of book production.⁴ Gutenberg movable metal type facilitated faster composition of metal typefaces, and thereby, the mass printing of the Bible. His method made it possible to meet Martin Luther’s wishes that all people should be able to own their personal copy of the Bible so that they could read the words of God for themselves according to their own conscience, and not according to the dictate or interpretation of the priesthood. This challenged the monopoly then held by the authorities on the state of knowledge, and was credited as the first mass media technology that played a strategic role in the European Renaissance movement against the church and state in the 15th century.⁵

Understanding The New Media

It took almost four centuries after Gutenberg invention for the print media to come into full bloom and daily newspapers grow to become accepted as the mass communication media. Yet, the printed mass media which have not been really accepted as the basic, daily necessity ingrained in the habit of people from all walks of life, are already started declining today. The total number of media and circulation are decreasing, and many leading news-papers publications are either closing, switching to be one of the new media, or at least publish an additional online edition. The total number of subscribers have been diminishing continuously, although total number of all readers may stay stagnant or perhaps increasing a little with those who read the papers online.⁶

Similar historical developments also happen with the other mass communication media, although in an increasingly shorter time frame. Voice broadcasting media took about 100 years to be accepted across the world as a part of the daily communication routine; now radio has become only a small part among other information sources to attend – even then, only at special time segments, inserted between other activities (e.g., on the morning drive to the office, during traffic jams, etc.). The audiovisual broadcasting media (television) was

adapted even faster by the general population of the world; only within 25 years from the start of its introduction in any community, TV was able to be get full acceptance in the daily household routine – it may even interrupt and rearrange a family household time schedule. All of these mass media are now being gradually replaced in some way or in some parts by the new media which was introduced only toward the end of the last decade of the 20th Century (in the 1990s) in most parts of the world.⁷ Yet, the influence and reach of the new media has been growing at an even faster rate than what the old media could achieved in a longer period of time.⁸

The above discussion shows that the speed of transition for each new technology have been turning even faster than the previous one with the passing of time, true to the dynamics of technological change. Each discovery or invention would make the next process easier and faster. For a simplified example, the theoretical part in the process of developing, testing, and finalising the binary digit system took many years, but once the basic problems were solved, the bit could be applied for various practical purposes which helped the development of further digital devices in a much shorter time. This explains why various new features of the new media could be introduced one after the other in any country, once the basics of the new media (the internet infrastructure) is established. The speed of growth may vary due to each country condition, but real transition to a new media society would depend on real understanding of the concept. Having the infrastructure alone is not enough, there is a need for understanding the potentials; otherwise, all the BTS, satellite, and smart phones will only be wasted for exchanging ringback tones, funny pictures, or sexting. In the meantime the scope of new media applications, platforms, and gadgets will keep increasing.

To understand the new media, however, is not as straightforward as it may seem. New media is a new, very broad term, used differently by many, encompassing a variety of meanings,

concepts, technologies, and functions. Essentially, most works on the subject have complain on the problems involved in “pinning down the concept of ‘new’ media.”⁹ Some views new media as the various technologies in used while others concentrate only on a specific one, e.g., the internet. Many even avoid defining the new media, although they claim to focus on the subject.

In general, all new media have certain similar characteristics, which relate to changes in the media production, distribution, and use.¹⁰ The characteristics are: digital, interactive, hyper-textual, virtual, networked, and simulated. Without going into technical elaboration, these characteristics made it possible for a single new media to present various content forms (e.g., text, picture, video, sound) together as one in the same media, by virtue of the digital technology.¹¹ It also transforms the new media audience into an independent, autonomous user, who is free to choose or attend any specific content or topic, in any form of presentation, from any new media site within the world-wide-web – or a combination of those, at his own time and convenience – due to the new media interactive, hypertextual, and networked characteristics. With the transformation to the new media, the claims on media power as argued in the theories on gate-keeping, agenda-setting hypothesis, and framing effect, would become outdated.¹²

Please note, that the comparison made here between the new media with the old mass media, should be viewed carefully. It is done here because the concept of media in the public mind is always related to mass media. Media research and literature have been concentrated mostly on mass communications media. Nevertheless, the new media is not in any way the continuation of the mass media, or that it is mass media plus new technology, as some writers claim. The study of mass communication originally started with newspaper effects, developing further into public opinion on politics and social-economic matters. It is only natural, therefore, that the use of any communications

media for political purposes are seen in the perspective of mass media.

The focus of this conference on the role of the new media in the Arab Spring political upheavals, certainly should be examined in a wider communications context than mass communications. The intended impact is not limited to a mass media audience, or the users of particular new media, but a much wider scope of public – beyond a specific media, even broader. This means that in terms of communication levels, it can not be limited to mass communication level, but include all levels, from interpersonal communication to social communications and networking level. Mass media can only reach reach their specific audience, except if communications are forwarded further by its audience to their networks through their social media.

Works on the social media in Western countries have shown the extensive networks of such new media, which still keeps growing fast. A comprehensive book now much in use among business and network practitioners (Safko, 2010) list 15 social media categories which are still expanding at present time. They are: social networking, publishing, photo sharing, audio, video, microblogging, livecasting, virtual worlds, gaming, productivity applications, aggregators, RSS, search engines, mobile, and interpersonal social media.

Social communications networks may be more potential in our countries, especially where mass media have limited reach to the general population, among others: due to low reading habit or low economic position (cannot afford to pay subscription). Yet, in traditional societies, social networks are much stronger. With the increase of internet users, particularly the rise of cellphone users, the reach of social media would be most potential, as one study on the links between traditional community network and cellphone networks have shown (Irwansyah, 2010).

At this point a question arises whether the social media also played a role in the Arab Spring or any other upheavals around the world.

Which of the various new media are the most relevant and potential for future needs of Muslim countries?

The New Media in Political Upheavals

The Middle Eastern experience inspire others on the potentials of the new media for the civil society movement in the rest of the world, including the Western countries, where the new social media was originated. The idea that social media could mobilize the masses that was proven successful at Cairo's Tahrir Square, for example, is adopted as the "Arab Spring Model" by the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement when they seize New York's Zuccoti Park in New York's Wallstreet financial district. By the use of the Cairo model, this informal, non-institutional, rather unorganised protest movement was able to develop into a strong resistance movement of a broader scale through social networking links in various cities. Starting with a single Twitter hashtag, it was able to mobilize thousands of people in various cities within the US (e.g., Boston, Washington, Oakland) as well as outside (Rome, London) to join this decentralized and leaderless movement pressing for a fundamental and structural change to the current unjust economic system as symbolised by the Wall Street.¹³ The movement slogan "We are the 99%" reflects the increasing inequality in the United States where "1% of the total population control 40% of the total wealth and received more than 20% of the income".¹⁴

So far, the model has not achieved a quick success when applied outside of its original cultural environment, the Middle East. The OWS action at Zuccotti Park has been disbanded by the City of New York. Nevertheless, the movement initiators are still convinced that it would expand virally to networks of other groups with similar characteristics, and finally would become one real worldwide movement. In Facebook, for example, Occupy Europe has more than 369,000 who have signed a petition against corporate sponsors of the G20 November summit in Paris. There are also a variety of other

“Occupy” groups in many other places, such as the Occupy the British and Celtic Islands (together with England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales), national Occupy movements in various countries, an Occupy the Media, Occupy Toronto Market Exchange action, and a series of one-hour general strikes in various cities.

Many are skeptical on the future of the Occupy movements. Yet, the Nobel Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz, considers the whole series of protest actions that began with the 1999 anti-globalization protest in Seattle and started anew with the Arab Spring movements in Tunisia in January 2011, then spreading further into Egypt, Spain, and followed by OWS movement as “one global social protest movement”, regardless of each movement stated agenda. Modern technology enables all “social movements to transcend borders as rapidly as ideas can”. Hence, whatever the name of the movement in where-ever place it is located, all of the protests are essentially one, to fight rising inequality around the world. For Stiglitz, the global “system” will not set things straight: legislation everywhere is being shaped by political influence and anti-competitive practices of the 1% rich rent seekers even in the electoral process in a democracy. Global social protests through the new media is the future trend to correct the rise in global inequality.¹⁵

There are also doubts that social media are genuinely effective in achieving the movements success. Definitive research is lacking, but some studies showed that the role of new media had been limited, and in many cases they failed to achieve their goals. Earlier “revolutions” (e.g., in Moldova) were cracked down immediately by the regime since the government has been following the revolution’s new media platform continuously from the beginning.¹⁶ The significance of the new media are also exaggerated far beyond the actual development in some cases. The so-called 2009 Iranian Twitter revolution, for another case, was later criticised as mostly an American made “revolution”, involving tweets among people in

New York cafes “that give them the thrilled feeling of partaking in a revolution”, which later was overblown by their media.¹⁷

The failure of the movement to make sure that its goals are implemented consistently may also show the weaknesses of the new media as an effective instrument. While it is true, for example, that new media was successful in rallying Egypt population to unseat president Mubarak, the continuing success of the revolution became doubtful when it lost touch with political maneuverings, and the second round of the Tahrir Square action has to be urgently organised in response. Similarly, the real contribution of the new media in other cases such as in Libya easily became questionable when the real actions in the field are detached from the new media and turned to be more militaristic in nature, involving outside forces.¹⁸ Such intervention by foreign powers in an insurgency may be a widely accepted practice although not much discussed in the communication literature.¹⁹

A true understanding of the new media role in the movements is frequently missing because reports are mostly one-sided, looking only from the perspectives of the insurgency public, especially those of the activists. However, the new media is actually a verbal weapon of action used by both sides to achieve its own respective goal. Hence it does not have to conform to any ethical standard and may use questionable practices, e.g., manipulation of facts and data, deceptions, hacking, etc.) to achieve its own victory over the adversary.²⁰ This is only natural as in any conflicting or hostile situation between a protest movement and the authority, in which the mind and loyalty of the total population is being contested.

As with any other product of technology, the new media is basically neutral. It is not developed specifically just for protest movements in order they can overthrow governments in power, or vice versa. Both sides may, and do, use it for each own specific needs at a given time. Any government, authoritarian or democratic, would intuitively apply any

available means to safeguard national security, including the regime in power.²¹ It may start with information gathering by monitoring the dissidents media, followed by stronger actions. At the beginning of the Arab Spring, the Tunisian Internet Agency assigned 2,000 online police officers to enforce censorship by massively blocking media websites, in addition to curbing the distribution of videos and photos.²² With the change of regime following the victory of the revolution, censorship was lifted.

Obviously, a clear explanation or analysis for the failure or success of the new media in relations to such political movement, should take the government factor into account. The revolution movement is directed at the government in power; for the insurgents the media technology is only an instrument they use to achieve the goal. The position of technology or media is neutral in the fight between the parties in conflict. Although the way the media is used by the insurgents is important, actually it is the reaction of the government in power that play a determining role.

The challenges faced by an authoritarian government to make the best use of the new media, including to control its content are overwhelming. The growth of the media now are fast, more complex in organization, form and production. Control can no longer be done just by erasing banned keywords like old-time censor of pornographic or provocative matters.

The case of China can best illustrate the complex problems faced by such a country in managing the new media environment. In the one hand, the government needs to facilitate the fast growth of its internet industry (including the new media) to meet the rising market, the demand for better living, education, and the necessity to stimulate the overall economy. To safeguard political stability, however, there is a contradictory need to manage and prevent potentially negative impact of the flood of information brought in by the internet, which may include potential discontent among younger generations, conflict between the national ideology and the wider global

awareness, dissatisfaction with the lagging progress in the rural area when compared to the material living exposed by the media, and the wide diversity of its population (which in China also comprise of the Uighur Muslims ethnic group which were involved in the 2009 Urumqi riots). In addition, the size and the reach of the new media is such that has to be very careful in its handling of the new media.²³

Faced with that kind of challenge, China has several options to control the content and influence the impact of new media. Based on its ideology and revolutionary experience, however, the instinctive temptation was in favor of a harsh or forceful action. Hence, when an ethnic conflict involving Muslim ethnic group erupted in Urumqi, Xinjiang, in July 2009, China immediately imposed total communication blackout which turned out to last for six months.²⁴ Some information did seeped out of Xinjiang due to computer-savvy young generation of internet users, but not for long. The censor removed all of the comments on Xinjiang in various websites within a few hours.²⁵ This method of censorship is still enforced now across the country today, and even expanded to include the filtering of cell phone text messages.²⁶ In addition, the authorities apply some of the insurgent's strategy: to make original internet sites (such as microblogs) to develop community-based social networks which are not against the government, run by paid "net commentators".²⁷

The control of new media is becoming more difficult with increasing sophistication of the activists in their application of media technology – frequently with the involvement of foreign experts, sympathisers, even foreign power. As described in Foreign PolicyNet.Effect, the new media networks make it "suddenly possible to transcend the rigid structures of media control erected by the authoritarian regimes": messages can now travel via these new networked public sphere in a "peer-to-peer manner, bypassing traditional platforms of distribution" (Morozov, 2009). The opposition also use hackers to attack government web

sites, and fax bridges to keep news spreading in the face of online censorship (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011). New media communications become even more complex, when more anti-censorship and anonymity services sprang up to circumvent censors, not necessarily due to political or ideological purposes but even more for business and industrial security needs. On the other hand, such actions may not necessarily stop the censors, who feel challenged to escalate to a more complicated cyberwar.²⁸

The political uses of new media as public communication is not only limited to freedom of speech. The previous pages have shown that new media have been used successfully in certain cases of “revolutions” – real revolutions which come from the clash between population and their authoritarian regimes – but in other cases the new media have been used more for PR or political communication purposes, to paint the revolution as more authentic or genuine, even when it was not. In other words, some of the credits that are supposedly for “revolution” that have been won by the new media, may only be a form an image resulted by the the uses of old mass media.

The new media offer certain advantages for political communication, compared to the old mass media. By virtue of its interactive characteristics, for example, one type of new media could follow and get involved with the dynamics of realtime politics, 24/7, and offer a virtual public space where politicians and public could interact. There are also other types of new media, to fulfill different types of interactions useful for various players in the arena of political communication. Yet, it is not the only forum for political maneuvers; public political communication also use the new media in combination with old mass media.

Global links. Note, however, that the new media has a built-in disadvantage in political communication, i.e. the problem of identification of participants or the political source of media content, particularly if media is used for discussion groups, interactive debates, and the like. The stated source, for instance, may be misleading. This explain why the issue of media

content and censorship become serious and complicated, involving new technologies and counter actions, cyberwarfare, and the like. Without awareness on such development, countries may fall into the trap of foreign interests in their media policy.

Conclusion

With basic understanding on the characteristics and dynamics of the New Media, many questions could be asked about today’s social media in the Muslim world. This paper will not attempt to provide answers, but offer some basic observations on the existence of the Muslim social media today along the line of discussions in this paper:

First. Just like past communication technology discovery (e.g., Guternberg invention), today’s new media is a break through orthodox scholars control on interpretation of Islam, thus providing exposure to diversity and freedom. While older generations are not internet minded, their basis for awareness is already high by their use of religious-oriented daily applications of new technology. By virtue of technological skills from early age, new media and social networks promise a better future for younger generations.

Second, the Internet brought Muslims across geographies and ideologies around the world, transcend national boundaries and cultures to develop an extensive number of social networkings, which could become the basic fundamentals for new cooperation in various fields, locations, levels of government in the future; free and open online discussions have made individual conversion to Islam based on deep conviction instead of pressure

Third, the new media have opened opportunities for women to break up traditional constraints, through virtual social media relationship in still closed societies, and more open network forms in the rest of the Muslim world. However, the problem of doctrines, policy restriction, censorship, and the like, are still need to find solution.

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Notes:

1. This expression was from Wael Ghonim, Google's Middle East marketing director, who set up the Facebook Group "Kullina

Khalid Said" (<http://www.facebook.com/EIShaheed>) in June 2010. This group is widely recognised as one "of the most important public platforms mobilizing for the January 25 demonstrations that marked the beginning of the end of the Mubarak regime" (Hofheinz, 2011).

2. The global media started to popularise the term "Blogging revolution" to describe the events against state crackdown on the liberal press in Iran (2005) and Egypt (2006). In 2009 came the "Twitter revolution", the civil unrest against alleged fraudulent actions in the election in Moldova; and in Iran, following presidential election protest, also known as "Green revolution" (2009-2010). This was followed by the "Facebook revolution" in Tunisia (2010-2011) which ended with the fall of Ben Ali regime), and in Egypt which ended the regime of Hosni Mubarrak. See Hofheinz, 2011; Allagui & Kuebler 2011; Morozov, 2009.
3. Mercado (1986); Suwannati (1992); Adelman (2004), Downing (2006). The cellular phone texting technology is especially suited for the 2001 Revolution, due to its capability to automatically forward, multiply, and send the same message at once to several addresses – each of which could also automatically forward the message to multiple addresses, thus reaching a vast number of receivers in almost no time. The strategic point of the meeting was at Epifano de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), a highway that connects five cities of Metro Manila, where earlier demonstrations confronted government troops, e.g. in the historical 1986 People's Power Revolution. The popular text message sent that day was "Go 2 EDSA. Wear Black." The Philippines are known as "a country with text appeal", where a text costs only about three seconds of voice calls; in most markets a text cost roughly as much as about 30 to 90 seconds of voice (Downing, 2006).

4. The older way was manually copying the whole text by hand drawing page by page. This was followed by the use of similarly slow text-producing technique, the hand carving of each page by hand on wooden blocks, to be used as the master form for making printed impression (or press) on paper.
5. See: Hiebert, Ungurait, Bohn (1991:566-567); Dominic (2009:56-57); Rogers (1999:35).
6. The loyal readers are usually of the old generation, whose longlife habitual routine include the reading of the same newspapers he had since they were of younger age; they still read due to increasing life expectancy. Note, however, that those who attend to the printed media through online edition can not be classified or treated as readers of the printed edition. They are not subscribers or paying readers and do not contribute any income to the paper. Also, since they are reading the digital version by way of new media platforms, they may only do it in passing, partially, without full attention.
7. A possible exception in the time being is the case of the news broadcasting media, which seem to show a trend to become the bridge of the new media. The case with these international television media (like Aljazeera, CNN, BBC, etc.) seems to be different. People attend to these media on unplanned schedule but for specific information needs (e.g. on particular topic, analysts, breaking news) thus, not as a general pattern in daily life. The content of these media are increasingly organised close to the new media pattern: real time, linked to other new media in different parts of the world (e.g., containing running text from tweets), may contain dynamic real-life citizen journalism report in real-time voice, text, or pictures. In other words, this particular media is no longer a traditional mass media, but already a mix of old-and-new media. Hence, in a certain way, this type of media can be called also as the bridge to new media.
8. Between 2000-2011, for example, Internet users in the Middle East grew 1,987.0% from around 3.2 m to 68,5 million; in Africa it increased 2,527.4%; in Indonesia 1,980.0% from 2 million to 39.6 M. Indonesia is also the 3rd largest Facebook country. Internet Usage Statistics, World Internet Usage, www.internetworldstats.com.
9. Pavlik, 1996; Axford & Huggins, 2001; Hansen, 2004.
10. Lister et al., 2009, especially Chapter 1: New Media and New Technologies.
11. This is different than in the "old" mass media: each content format is presented separately in different mass communication medium according to its own analog production process (e.g., print, voice, audiovisual, etc.). Thus, a news item on a presidential speech, for instance, can only appear in the form of printed text and still picture in the printed newspaper, only in the form of voice in the audio broadcast media, or in audiovisual form in audiovisual media (television).
12. For a brief description of these theories, see for instance: McQuail (2000:454-455).
13. Berkowitz, 2011.
14. Stiglitz, 2011.
15. For Stiglitz, the whole global protest movement is a reflection of the action of "the 99%" of the world population.
16. Morozov, 2009; Morozov 2011; Gilson, 2011.
17. Hofheinz, 2011. Other earlier revolutions include the "blogging revolution" that failed to topple a single regime"; the Facebook revolution that the members themselves were unaware of its occurrence, hence called as the "revolution without revolutionaries". There was also the "Facebook strike" that claimed to be able to empty Cairo streets on April 6, 2008, while others said that people then stay inside to avoid sandstorm.

18. Global news reports during the course of the Libyan revolution openly show the intervention of various nations and their military forces. See, e.g.: the admission by US Secretary of State Clinton during her visit to Tripoli, 18 October 2011. Although US participation is imperceptible on the ground, its involvement turns out to be decisive in organising NATO actions, and the use of its Predator drones or UAV (unmanned aerial vehicles) that are controled directly from US mainland, among others in the attack against Ghadafi convoys.
19. One example of such intervention occured during Moldova's Twitter Revolution, when the US Depatment of State requested Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance to avoid disturbing the service of protesters. See: Sean Kennedy, <http://smallwarsjournalcom/node/11414>.
20. The use of such questionable or unethical tactics is not only possible but is commonly facilitated by the technology in use. Various computer programs and devices have been developed for the purpose of cyber attacks on websites or their contents, including hacking, defacing, fake websites to distribute rumors, piracy, distributed denial of service attacks (DDOS), etc. See, e.g., nationalsecuritylawbrief.com/2011/03/14/cyber-attacks.in.the.media
21. The means may include covert actions or intelligence operations, e.g. cyber warfare, clandestine operations, information deception, etc. Non-democratic countries are said to have such agencies operate domestically as well as in foreign countries. Supposedly, in democratic countries like the US, such agencies (e.g., the CIA) are prohibited to act against its own citizens domestically; they are specifiially directed at foreign countries. Nevertheless, since 9/11 and terrorist attacks, however, US establishes the Department of Homeland Security to coordinate actions against security threats, including cyber attacks.
22. Allagui & Kuebler, 2011. Surprisingly, however, this is not understood by many protest movements which keep using open new media platforms for action planning, thus practically insuring that their actions would not likely to succeed. The earliest example on record was the planning of flash-mobs action in Belarus in 2006; it used the online blog LiveJournal, ignoring the obvious risk that the Russian intelligence agency KGB was also reading the same messages online at the same time. A similar case occured in Iran, where mobile apps favored by Iranian dissidents were also used by the Ahmadenijad government apparatus to track them (Morozov, 2009).
23. From China total population, estimated in 2011 to be more than 1.3 billion persons, 36.3 % of which, or 485 million are internet users. This is a 463 times increase from the year 2000, when internet users in China totaled 22.5 million ("Asia Internet Usage and Population", Internet Usage Statistics, www.internetworldstats.com). In 2007, Chinese users sent 700 billions text messages from their personal mobile phones, more than the rest of the world combined. This figure was before cellphone penetration topped 50% in the country. See: http://shanghailist.com/20010/01/20/okay_so_that_sexting_ban_in_china.php.
24. When the riot began, communications were immediately cut off, mosques were temporarily closed and *Jumu'ah* Friday prayers were canceled (although Muslims gathered for prayer anyway), and Internet access in the city were immediately cut off. The shut down of communications in Urumqi occured only for the third time; previously it was implemented in parts of Tibet, where ethnic unrest was feared, and ahead of the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown. Source: news.xinhua.com/english, www.reuters.com,
25. The comment are replaced with the line "This posting does not exist". The same

method is also applied to prevent searches on topics related to the subject. Searches for certain key words as “Urumqi”, “Uighur”, “7.5” (for July 5, the date the riots begin) or “Xinjiang” were blocked and gave no results.

26. In the case of text messages, when any user types a banned word on any mobile phone, the screen goes blank, and the message will not be transmitted correctly. The government identifies 13 different types of “vulgar content” that are not allowed which may be expanded with clear reasoning. When the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the jailed Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo, the words “Nobel”, “Oslo” and “Norway” become forbidden. Critics then post pictures of various empty chairs through the new media to draw attention to Liu’s absence in the ceremony; this, too, was deleted by the censors after they caught on to the joke. Each phone is permitted to send only 20 messages per day to prevent it from being used to organised events. See: Larmer, 2010; <http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2010/01/20/>; <http://www.upiasia.com/Politics/2010/01/22/>.
27. China’s high internet penetration shows that the new media is becoming an

increasingly important part of the general public or common people’s life, hence opening more channels of social communication in the communities. The existence of net commentators and their websites, however, create new competition for anti-government activists. This may explain why they are seldom discussed in Western reports, and if so, always with an unfavorable image. Even the most objective report from BBC News call them as China’s Internet ‘spin doctors’ (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7783640.stm>). Most reports call them as “China’s 50-cent party” for the payment they received for each posting. See, e.g.: <http://www.interlocals.net/?q=node/367> and http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/01/china_50_cents_party_take_on_the_jasmine-revolutions.

28. The contest between Chinese censor vs. Internet users is a good example, where both sides are said to be involved in a cat-and-mouse game, where the government keeps developing better mousetraps. See, e.g., <http://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2011/11/17/chinas-great-firewall-tests-mysterious-scans-on-encrypted-communications>.