Contents

Foreword 13
Introduction 16

Chapter 1: Are Social Networks Valid Sources for News?

Overview: Social Media Make News a Social Experience
Kristen Purcell, Lee Rainie, Amy Mitchell, Tom Rosenstiel, and Kenny Olmstead
Most Americans now employ multiple media to get their news, and the Internet is the medium that has been the major change agent. There are three “Ps” that define how people want their news—portable, personalized, and participatory. These trends have been enabled by the popularity of social media sites that enable people to post news that is relevant to them and the development of smartphones that has changed how news is gathered and disseminated.

Yes: Social Networks Are Valid Sources for News

Facebook Helps People Share Credible Information
Randi Zuckerberg, as told to Rory O’Connor
Facebook’s mission is to enable people to share information that is important to them with their friends. In a world where there is a confusing amount of information available, people rely on these “trusted referrals” from their friends to help filter and make sense of the news.

Social Media Can Make Traditional News Organizations More Relevant
Michael Skoler
Traditional news organizations have lost the trust of readers, particularly younger people. Younger people don’t want to be passive recipients of news. They want information that they can control and that is relevant to their lives. By using social media sites to listen to people and establish a connection with them, journalists can regain relevance.
Twitter Helps Reporters Connect with the News

*Steve Buttry*

Edward Wasserman’s column about Twitter shows the trap a journalist can fall into when he writes about something he knows little about. Wasserman writes that Twitter—a social media network he has never used—poses a threat to journalism. Actually, Twitter helps journalists to be more connected to people, not the converse, as Wasserman fears.

No: Social Networks Are Not Valid News Sources

Social Media Cannot Replace Professional News Organizations

*Bab Palser*

Although there is a role for social media in getting out information during a major news event, that role is not one of journalism. Social media sites during the earthquake in Haiti proved helpful in rescuing some people and for organizing fund-raising. However, social networks are too disorganized to provide context and perspective to an event, roles that traditional journalism performs very well.

Twitter Is Often Inaccurate

*Herman Manson*

Twitter is playing a role in quickly disseminating news. Unfortunately, sometimes it doesn’t get it right. In the traditional news business, professionals check facts to ensure accuracy. These organizations are under increasing pressure from Twitter to get out information more quickly, and this could compromise journalistic standards of accuracy.

Twitter Connects Only the Young and Hip

*Edward Wasserman*

Despite its increased use by journalists, Twitter poses risks to journalism. Newspaper managements worry about losing control of their reporters, who may tweet inappropriate news or opinions or who may post news items that should break first in their newspaper. An even bigger risk is the issue of inclusion. Only the young and technologically savvy are on Twitter. Journalists who embrace Twitter are neglecting a large—and silent—majority.
Chapter 2: What Impact Do Social Media Have on Politics?

Chapter Preface

Facebook Has a Permanent Role in Politics

Vincent Harris

Facebook is an inexpensive and highly effective tool for mobilizing support during a political campaign. Politicians are well advised not to try to create their own sites or to look for the “next Facebook” but to take advantage of the opportunities available on the already-popular social networking site.

The Impact of Social Media on Politics Is Fleeting

Julian E. Zelizer

Despite the successful campaigns of Barack Obama in 2008 and many Tea Party candidates in 2010, all depending heavily on the use of social media, there is evidence that the support generated by social media is transitory. This is because it lacks the strength of local organizing, where the party faithful continue grassroots efforts after elections to ensure that the loyalty of voters remains intact.

Complex Political Issues Are Trivialized by Social Media

Matt Bai

Politicians are using Twitter to broadcast mundane details of their daily lives in the misguided hope that this will serve to humanize them with their constituents. Social media tend to trivialize issues, at a time when an appreciation of complexity is needed.

Social Networks Enable Quick Collaboration Around Issues

Micah L. Sifry

Commentators who criticize Twitter because many politicians use it to share the mundane details of their days are missing the true value of social networks. Social networks are a powerful tool for enabling collaboration around political issues and campaigns.
Social Media Can Help Citizens Press for Free and Fair Elections

Asch Harwood

Although it was unlikely that the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria would be fairly conducted, a group targeted Facebook users in Nigeria to press for free and fair elections. Even though there are limitations to the effectiveness of social media in a country where many people don’t own computers, it is a good first step to get young people thinking that democracy is achievable.

Social Media Can Be Used to Spread Hatred

Jelena Maksimovic

While social networks can facilitate the involvement of young people in politics, this involvement isn’t always for the social good. In Serbia, social networks are being used to spread hate against gays and lesbians.

Social Media Enable Lawmakers to Communicate with the Public

Colleen J. Shogan

Advances in technology have dramatically impacted the way members of Congress interact with each other and their constituents, with social media creating the greatest change. Although currently most members of Congress use social media primarily to disseminate information to the public, the potential exists for social media to be used to facilitate a two-way dialogue.

Social Media Pose Risks for Politicians

Kiera Haley

Although social media enable politicians to communicate instantly and directly with the public, sometimes this isn’t a good thing. In an effort to respond immediately to an event, a politician may not carefully reflect on the message. Politicians from US Representative Peter Hoekstra to former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger have all created controversy with off-the-cuff remarks.
Chapter 3: Can Social Media Facilitate Political Change?

Chapter Preface

Yes: Social Media Can Facilitate Political Change

Social Media Empower People

Simon Mainwaring

Although several commentators have dismissed the role of social media in social change because of its reputation for focusing on trivial information, used properly it can be a powerful, transformative tool. Social media as a whole has the ability to engage people on a variety of levels, enabling it to be used by political activists to effectively promote their causes.

The Tunisian Revolt Was the World’s First Facebook Revolution

Anshel Pfeffer

The repressive Tunisian government for years controlled traditional media in the country. However, the government could not find a way to control social media sites, and Facebook became the means through which frustrated Tunisians disseminated reliable information and organized demonstrations.

No: Social Media Do Not Facilitate Political Change

Social Media Fail to Incite True Activism

Malcolm Gladwell

Those who are mistakenly claiming that social media were responsible for 2009 protests in Moldova and Iran are forgetting what truly constitutes social activism. The history of political movements clearly shows that activists have deep ties to each other. Social media platforms, on the other hand, are built around the concept of loose connections, with people communicating with those they barely know. Another key component of successful activism is leadership. Social media sites are networks, with no one in charge.
The Role of Social Media in Iran Was Exaggerated

Evgeny Morozov

The Western news media were too quick to credit the so-called “Iran Twitter Revolution” for using social media to stage protests against the Iranian presidential election. The young, technology-savvy people using Twitter in Iran were hardly representative of the majority of Iranians, and the importance of the dissent they staged was overblown.

Social Media Did Not Cause the Egyptian Revolution

Parvez Sharma

The revolution in Egypt had nothing to do with social networking. Most of the people in Egypt are poor and don’t use the Internet. They took to the streets in protest because they were fed up with decades of repression, poverty, and corruption.

Chapter 4: Should People Have Unrestricted Access to Social Networks?

Overview: Technology Makes It Harder for Repressive Governments to Censor

William J. Dobson

Austin Heap is a young computer programmer who has abandoned playing video games to take on the task of building anti-censorship software that can be used to enable free communication in repressive regimes. The considerable technological skill of young hackers is making it increasingly difficult for dictators to repress the free flow of information.

Yes: People Should Have Unrestricted Access to Social Networks

Internet Freedom Is an Essential Global Freedom

Hillary Rodham Clinton
The United States believes in and will vigorously protect access to a single Internet where people worldwide have unfettered access to information and the sharing of ideas. There is a direct correlation between the free flow of information and human progress. Those countries that censor social networks and search engines are denying their citizens a fundamental human right.

Repressive Governments Should Be Pressured to Have an Open Internet  
*Lucie Morillon and Jean-François Julliard*

Both the oppressed and their oppressors are using social media and other technological tools in a battle over censorship. Social networks enable repressed people to publicize their plight to the world. However, autocratic regimes such as North Korea, China, and Saudi Arabia have retaliated by censoring content and jailing dissident bloggers.

Facebook Should Not Censor Radical Posts  
*Greg Butterfield*

Citing its “terms of service,” Facebook has deleted several groups who support radical leftist causes, including a campaign citing BP’s culpability for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill; a group supporting the Palestinian resistance movement; and a group supporting Ricardo Palm- era, a jailed Colombian guerrilla leader. Social networking sites are an important tool in social advocacy, and censorship of these sites should not be tolerated.

No: In Some Circumstances, Access to Social Networks Should Be Restricted  
Censorship Is Appropriate in the Context of Different Value Systems  
*Derek Bambauer*

Although some repressive governments violate the human rights of their citizens through censorship, other countries appropriately filter what is allowed on the Internet based on their value systems. Freedom of expression needs to be understood in the context of the tradition and culture of a country.
The US Insistence on Internet Freedom Does More Harm than Good

Clay Shirky

The Internet policy of the United States as articulated by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton mistakenly focuses on preventing the censoring of websites and social media by restrictive governments. This approach places undue emphasis on the significance of Western media and ignores the importance of the tools that allow people to exchange information more personally and locally, such as cell phones.

Schools Need to Establish Some Limits to Social Media Use

Kathryn S. Vander Broek, Steven M. Puiszis, and Evan D. Brown

The popularity of the Internet and social media sites poses new challenges for school administrators. They need to balance two sometimes conflicting goals—the need to provide a safe learning environment with the need to protect students’ First Amendment rights. Some states are requiring districts to incorporate Internet safety instructions, specifically targeting cyberbullying, harassment, discrimination, and sexual predators.

Organizations to Contact

Bibliography

Index