Nonviolence And Social Media: Functions, Roles, And Advancements In The Practice Of Nonviolence Protest

Introduction

The emergence of social media has changed the way people communicate and receive information. As a part of media evolution, social media takes part in shaping what the mind perceives, including the socio-political phenomena happening at the time. Being a platform for many to access and features that have expanded the capability of information distribution also makes it a significant instrument for activists to voice their ideas and rally the masses. Through this essay, I would like to explore the ways of social media potentially enhance nonviolent protests and the extent of its effectiveness by discussing the roles, functions, and capability of the constantly-improved media.

This essay, however, will not gather data as standardization of efficiency of nonviolence movement have not yet have been developed. It rather discusses the relationship between nonviolence as a concept, the evolution of media, as well as the roles media plays in society that changes the way it is utilized for nonviolence movements. In order to thoroughly discuss the chosen topic for this essay, I will divide the essay into several parts which specifically discuss different concepts which I believe are relevant to be analyzed. The first part of the essay will explore the definition and concept of nonviolence as the main basis of this whole piece. As we will discuss social media as a nonviolent instrument, the second part will analyze the power of the media and its evolution that leads to the emergence of social media alongside its influence in politics. The third part will be comprised of Mundt, Ross, and Burnett's piece on the function of social media in order to understand how it is utilized by society today. Supported by previous discussions on nonviolence, the power of media, and its functions, the final part of the essay will be the main argument and the answer as to the extent of efficiency social media has played a part as a platform to express political resistance.

Sharp's and Gandhi's concepts of nonviolence

The study of nonviolence is often based upon the works of Mahatma Gandhi and Gene Sharp. As we will explore nonviolent action in the form of digital activism in this essay, it is essential to discuss its definitions and concept as a whole in order to understand the aims attempted to be achieved through such a movement. By understanding the goals or aims, analyzing the efficiency of social media as a nonviolent instrument will be clearer to deliver.

Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most prominent figures in nonviolence studies. His main principles of ahimsa, satyagraha, and Tapasya resonated the idea of nonviolence which became the point of its emergence during the fight for independence against colonies in India (Mayton, 2009) (Bose and Jalal, 2004). Working hand-in-hand, Gandhi believes nonviolent movements are fundamentally based on ahimsa and satyagraha as the Gandhian understanding of nonviolence emphasizes on the pursuit of truth through non-injury ways in alignment with the relationship between the two principles. It is believed that Gandhi's concept is derived from Hinduism and Jainism—hence it's spiritual upbringing within the concept (Schock,

2013). Gene Sharp, however, expanded Gandhi's concept of nonviolence. Involving the approach of realism to his Gandhi-inspired work, Sharp's idea of nonviolence became more "practical" as he explored the methodologies and tactics for nonviolence struggles (1959)(Weber, 2004). Sharp delivered a more specific analysis to the practice of nonviolence as he also involved the Consent Theory of Power by elaborating the significance of consent between the ruled and the rulers (Atack, 2006). According to Schock, the key point among Sharp's 198 methods of nonviolent actions is the promotion of social change (2013, p. 282). In a larger picture, Gandhi may have shaped the concept of nonviolence itself but Sharp has made a connecting link to methodologies realistically practiced in order to execute nonviolent actions.

Media: the power it holds, its evolution, and its advancements

The media itself has an intense relationship with politics. As Eric Louw argued in its work Media and Political Processes (2005), it argued how the media have altered "political processes" and the behavior of those who are involved in the political scene. Such a statement is supported with the constructivist view of the power the media holds as the curator and distributor of information. Therefore, this part of the essay would like to discuss on the role the media plays in politics, its influence, and evolution leading to the emergence of social media.

Media is regarded as an instrument to both gather and distribute information. Its power lays on its utilization of our senses as well as being a bridge between actual phenomena and those who were not involved in the occurrence. The media's fundamental influence comes from its usage of sensory engagement in delivering information. That information could take form in various ways such as writings, visual still images, moving images, and audios. Its interaction with our senses differs as each type has different degrees of impact in triggering emotions and thoughts on a particular phenomenon as well. For instance, an image may be able to visually capture colors, facial expressions, and body gestures of the living beings in the frame but does not include the "political significance" of the actors involved nor the location (Bleiker, 2015). As Bleiker—an International Relations researcher focusing on visuality and emotions—argued in his work Pluralist Methods for Visual Global Politics, one must also consider what is not included or outside of the frame in order to analyze the politics of the actual reality captured, hence why Bleiker developed the methodologies of analyzing political visual images (2015, p. 878). Other than providing different scope of information, the emotional impact also differs depending on the form of the conflict representation itself. Images are proven to be more memorable compared to writings as it involves more variety of colors and shapes, with less complexity of making the effort to read as what writings require its audience to do (Dewan, 2015).

Media has evolved, variety of forms and platforms have emerged as well. Social media becomes one of the most influential media agencies, democratizing the spread of information and advancing the ways information is delivered. As it is with the evolution from telegram to television, the emergence of social media platforms has changed the speed of collection, production, and distribution of actual phenomena to those who are not present on-field. The way information is shared has changed—consumers are no longer "passive audiences" who only watch or read without being able to publish their responses. Rather, anybody who has access to the internet is able to receive and input information in a public platform of social media (Brooking and Singer, 2016). Its exposure also reaches an extraordinary amount of masses; 1,8 billion of people are actively using Facebook, 300 million are on Twitter, and 75% or "world leaders" online on both sites (Zeitsoff, 2017). Not only major exposure to the masses, social

media also has algorithms that target certain information to specific people who are potentially interested on the distributed information (Agrawal, 2016). This makes the flow of information faster and wider than before, diminishing time and borders on its way.

Observing the influence of media and its evolution into its contemporary forms, a constructivist approach greatly explains the relationship between (social) media and its audiences—or users. As proposed by one of its fundamental thinkers, Immanuel Kant, constructivists conform with the idea of how our perception of reality is shaped by our surroundings and what is delivered to our senses (Kauppi and Viotti, 2012). With social media being one of the most significant sources of all forms of information—from writings to audio and moving images coming from a variety of people—this emphasizes the power social media has in shaping people's understanding of the world. Hence why it is strategic to use such a platform to spread certain ideas including radical social movements, which has been done by many today.

The function of social media in political activism according to Mundt, Ross, Burnett

The study of the function of social media in activism—or digital activism—has been conducted by Mundt, Ross, and Burnett by analyzing the Black Lives Matter movement. According to their work, Scaling Social Movements Through Social Media: The Case Of Black Lives Matter, there are three major functions of social media throughout the movement: mobilization, coalition building, and meaning-making (2008). The authors elaborated mobilization as the action of gathering and rallying "new activists" on board to voice the pre-existing ideas proposed by previous activists (2008, p. 1). While coalition-building means the construction of networks that lead to cooperation among users in order to optimally execute their actions (p. 2). Finally as mentioned above, social media provide information to the masses—hence why meaning making becomes one of its functions. Opening discussions on climate change, gender inequality, racial discrimination, and all of the debates around it as well as other contemporary issues reform the pre-existing ideas leading up to 'making new meanings' which were rarely being discussed prior to the existence of social media.

Enhancement of nonviolence movements and their efficiency

As we have thoroughly discussed the concept of nonviolence from both Gandhi and Sharp, the evolution and power that social media holds, as well as the functions served throughout the conducted social movement of Black Lives Matter, there are several highlights to signify the way contemporary communication technology enhance nonviolent protests and activism. The advancements of features provided by social media platforms such as group-making, online petitions, hashtags, free publication of writings, artworks, or any other form of expressions, as well as adjusted algorithms make nonviolence actions easier to be accessed by many (Walters, 2016) (Rozpedowski, 2018). Raising awareness—or what Mundt, Ross, and Burnett call as meaning-making—is often the main objective of the utilization of social media in the practice of nonviolent resistance. Referring back to Sharp's work on 198 methods of nonviolence actions, this aligns with Sharp's key point among all the methods which is the promotion of social movement. With its vast advancements and major exposure, such promotion can be exposed to a wider range of audiences compared to previous communication technologies.

Especially with the power of sensory engagement that it holds, social media easily shapes its

audiences' understandings of the world. In a constructivist lens, social media and media, in general, has the power. As explained above, the Kantian way of thinking would consider information as a powerful aspect of perceptions of reality. Combining the advancements it has possessed as well as its main power as an information provider, social media is not only an evolution of the media but also an evolution to nonviolence movements themselves. Not only does it bring features that make such movements more accessible to conduct, it does not disregard the principle of ahimsa that Gandhi promoted which is the fundamental basis of nonviolence actions. Therefore, not only that social media is a strategic platform, it also aligns with the pre-existing concepts of nonviolence, both by Sharp and Gandhi.

The democratization of information might also mean a wider scope of democratization in general. The efficiency of social media for nonviolence movements may be difficult to measure as standardization is unclear, and such practice is subject to social, political, and normative influences as an indicator of success. However, it is unfair to say that social media has not improved nonviolent dissent—as some results indicate that the features it provides has caused political impacts. For instance, due to an online petition signed by 1.2 million people, Donald Trump was "officially banned" from visiting the UK as the idea made its way to be debated by the MPs (Tait, 2017) (Pinnington, 2017). Although it is still considered less effective compared to lobbying, rally, or protests, petitions and other publications on social media definitely did its fundamental role: raising awareness and making meanings (Mele, 2016).

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, we also have covered the alignment of Gandhi, Sharp, Kant, and several other International Relations scholars' ideas around the media, nonviolence, and the shaping of worldviews. This piece can be considered as using a multidimensional approach to analyze the potential enhancements of nonviolent movements through social media. It is essential to consider the relationship between audiences and the media throughout its dynamic evolution in order to analyze the roles of social media in nonviolent protests and political movements. Although its efficiency is still unclear to determine, social media definitely has broadened the ways of nonviolent movements to be conducted.

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