UTPOST

MAGAZINE

**UTRIKESPOLITISKA
FÖRENINGEN
UMEÅ**

Message from the editor

Technology is present in many of our lives. This has been the case for a while now, but even more obvious due to development of social media, technological advances and the dependency to use the internet for work, interests and central to this edition of UTPOST, to reach or spread information. It is a bridge that needs its functions to continue this process, easily assumed and sometimes forgotten but very important nevertheless.

The theme of this term UTPOST is how democracy and human rights are affected by technological advances and internet usage in the world today. A lot of news and information we receive from other parts of the world are via the internet, such as news apps and social media. How we communicate long distance is also based on the technological advances we have access to today. Social distance during the pandemic is one example of how technology and the internet has made it possible for many to be able to stay connected to each other. Several aspects of this subject are going to be covered by this edition of UTPOST, focusing on both general and specific cases of the access and use of the internet and social media in relation to democracy and human rights.

Felicia Nyman, Editor

UTPOST

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Photo credit: Pixabay

How and Why Big Data Changed Propaganda and Might Threaten Democracy

DAVID GREN

It was in March 2018 a story about the previously unknown British data and political consulting company Cambridge Analytica ran in newspapers. The former employee Christopher Wylie has said that Cambridge Analytica specialized in identifying and using vulnerabilities in voters to spread disinformation, propaganda, and rumors. The Swedish journalist Morgan Finnsiö points out in a documentary about the company and a scandal connected to it that the word, propaganda" may make a lot of people think of the second world war and for example posters that were frequently used back then. Finnsiö says it was more obvious who was behind the message during those times. But what Cambridge Analytica had done in the 2010:s decade is something different from the old fashion way of propaganda. What did Cambridge Analytica do differently? According to Finnsiö, the company intended to use big data for digital communication. What they did was to make Facebook users answer a

a survey where the user had to agree to give away information about themselves but resulting in also giving away information about their friends. In the end, 300,000 users did this survey voluntarily, as a result giving away 87 million Facebook users' personal information. The data was then used for analyzing behavior and personality which then made it possible to microtargeting political ads on social media. That is microtargeting political ads, creating content to resonate with specific voters with precision. This sort of precision has not yet been seen before the breakthrough of social media.

The CEO of Cambridge Analytica, Alexander Nix, has in front of a hidden camera said that the company has been involved in more than 200 countries to shift public opinion in a certain direction (Svensson, Emeli. 2020). Among them, data from Cambridge Analytica was used in the pro-Trump campaign in 2016 and it is confirmed that the company sold information to the Brexit campaign as well.

The story of Cambridge Analytica is both long and complicated. But what it essentially does is bring up the question of how big data may be used in modern political campaigns and may be used as a tool for modern and digital propagannd.

Before moving on to discussing how this could be a potential threat to democracy it is necessary to briefly discuss what big data is and what propaganda is and then address the potential threat to our democracy.

What is big data?
It was already back in 2012 when Steve Lohr wrote in the New York Times about the age of big data in his article "The Age of Big Data". In the article, Steve Lohr is reasoning about how Facebook and Google, for example, are collecting huge amounts of data about their users. Further on in the article, Lohr refers to the World Economic Forum that earlier that same year in a report declared that big data is a form of an asset just like either gold or a currency. So, what is big data? The amount of data is growing at a rapid speed and new technologies make it possible to collect data about all sorts of things combined with computers getting better at analyzing and structuring the data.

What is propaganda and how does "modern" propaganda look?
Propaganda is a form of systematically conducted activity to influence and affect people's opinions, values, or actions in a specific direction that the messenger wishes. This can be done with the use of posters and flyers, movies and television, the internet, press, radio, and media.

Since the beginning of the 2000s social media has become more important as a tool for the spread of propaganda. Among social media Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have become dominant tools. Israel and China are examples of two countries that systematically use social media to spread propaganda. The Chinese Communist Party is using social media to affect public opinion and has a sort of framework for paying users on social media to comment on social media posts in favor of the party to increase public support. While Israel 2013 have got a network of 500 students with broad knowledge of languages to spread positive information about the country on both Twitter and Facebook.

How propaganda based upon big data might threaten democracy
Brittany Kaiser, a whistleblower from Cambridge Analytica, has openly warned about Cambridge Analytica and said she is worried about democracy due to how big data can be used in political campaigns. Kaiser thinks big data can be used for either better or good. The problematic part, according to her , is when for example big data is used to decrease voter turnout in elections and manipulate voters. She is worried about the future ahead, for example, the company Data Propria has been founded by former employees from the industry continues.

However, according to Kaiser, the future ahead to combat the threat to democracy is users owning their data. Or at least users know more about how their data is used by companies and can decide whether or not they want to give it away.

A concrete example of how social media was used to affect an election, and a concrete example of how this tool can be used as a threat to democracy, was the 2016 presidential election when Russian attempts were made to counter Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. False information was spread to influence the election and it has been tracked back to Russia.

In concluding remarks, the world of propaganda is changing within society when new technologies are developed. Social media and big data have made it possible to target groups with precision and big data can be used to analyze behavior and personality making these microtargeting ads successful. This can become a potential threat to democracy if data is used to manipulate voters and their behavior which might for example include decreasing the voter turnout in elections.

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At its worst,
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and cost lives."

Michelle Bachelet

Photography Karl Visuals

THE DARK SIDE OF DIGITALIZATION

Lou Danion
from amnesty student group

"At its best, the digital revolution will empower, connect, inform and save lives. At its worst, it will disempower, disconnect, misinform and cost lives."

This quote had been pronounced in 2019 by Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as part of an investigation that highlights the impact of digital on human rights. It highlights a specific, little-known case: the undeniable impact of the Meta group in the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. In 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya became refugees after fleeing severe violence and crimes against humanity committed in a campaign of ethnic cleansing by the Myanmar military. So you might be wondering what role Facebook played in this ethnic cleansing? It is consequent.
The group's dangerous algorithms and relentless pursuit of profit substantially contributed to the atrocities perpetrated, notably by spreading and amplifying anti-Rohingya content without any regulation. Meta knew or should have known that algorithmic systems were supercharging the spread of harmful anti-Rohingya content, but the company still failed to act. A group of Rohingya youths have since filed a complaint against Facebook. One of them, Mohamed Showife said in 2019: „The Rohingya just dream of living in the same way as other people in this world...but you, Facebook, you destroyed our dream." This example shows us how the Internet and digital technology pose challenges to the protection of human rights.

Originally, a universal discourse defined the role of the media as fundamental to the proper functioning of the democratic state. The ability of the media to provide information freely to all citizens guaranteed them equal access to the democratic process.

Platforms were seen as facilitators for citizens seeking to assert their rights. Often described as a digital revolution because of the role of social networks in mobilisation and protest, the Arab Spring is a striking example. Indeed, it is undeniable that to some extent the digitalisation of society has enabled advances in human rights.

The world has never been so connected and informed. We can now, at any scale, empower and investigate. We can use these means of communication to directly defend human rights, whether through satellite images or data streams. And even predict future violations through artificial intelligence. The video of the Uyghurs camps shared on social networks by Amnesty International had a considerable impact, mobilizing millions of people around the world.

The fight for human rights can therefore be done through social networks. Many non-governmental associations and activists daily fight for human rights by using the Internet as a means to operate better and to make their action more effective. But what is forgotten is to analyse the *dark side*. The number of revelations about global abuses of spyware, targeting human rights defenders, opposition politicians, journalists, and diplomats are in flagrant violation of the right to privacy.

These human rights violations are proven. Threats, intimidation and cyber-harassment lead to harassment, targeting, violence, murder, and even ethnic cleansing and genocide. Technologies also have a significant impact on our human rights, both positive rights, such as freedom of expression and association, and negative rights, such as protection from harassment, invasion of privacy and even violence.

If we look at the individual level, it is the exploitation of data that is problematic. It does not remain in the digital sphere but are monetised and politicized. In its Human Rights Report, published in July 2022, the Meta group makes no mention of the threat its networks pose to human rights, particularly the surveillance advertising business model that leads the company to collect more and more personal data.

The group seriously threatens the rights to privacy, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of thought, and the right to equality and non-discrimination and is inherently incompatible with the right to privacy. As our society enters a, surveillance capitalism', the giants Google and Facebook are set up as tech leviathans.

But this does not prevent states from using digitalisation for political purposes, whether they are democratic or authoritarian. Indeed, as the digital age abolishes borders, it radically redefines power relations. Some States are voluntarily tarnishing the reputations of human rights defenders by orchestrating harassment campaigns or posting false information about them. Others are using digital surveillance tools to track down and target rights defenders and other people perceived as critics. The Pegasus project is the most striking example.

In 2020 it was revealed that a large number (50,000 possibly infected phone numbers) of politicians, human rights activists, journalists and other political dissidents were being spied on worldwide with the private spy software Pegasus, developed by the Israeli company NSO group. Edward Snowden, whistleblower and president of Freedom of the Press Foundation said in July 2021: „NSO Group is the worst of the worst in selling digital burglary tools to players who they are fully aware actively and aggressively violate the human rights of dissidents, opposition figures, and journalists".

In addition to spying on you, the software can ensure your silence, especially when it comes to whistleblowers or journalists.

Hicham Mansouri, a Moroccan journalist living in France, described being targeted as "a very violent form of censorship, because we deprive ourselves of expressing ourselves on many subjects both in a professional and personal context.

Human rights are thus threatened by a software, devoid of any regulation. Indeed, it has become necessary to act, to find a universal human response in defense of universal human rights. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, equality and dignity must not be tainted. Each person has the right to life, free from discrimination, to political participation, privacy, liberty, a fair trial... But to guarantee and protect these rights, states must put in place regulations without interfering with privacy. This includes putting in place state policies that guarantee the protection of rights, including social, cultural and economic rights. This doesn't just mean passing new laws but also adapting the way we use institutions and processes.

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This includes putting in place state policies that guarantee the protection of rights, including social, cultural and economic rights. This doesn't just mean passing new laws but also adapting the way we use institutions and processes. Furthermore, tech giants must have an obligation of transparency and must stop selling data without explicit consent.

Users should be able to control their personal data. For democratic states claiming to respect human rights, a guarantee of secure and open access, free from surveillance and censorship to all, including targeted individuals, is necessary.

Finally, the implementation of human rights impact assessments at each stage of the deployment of artificial intelligence systems is essential.

Nevertheless, some legislation can be commended, notably the GDPR and more recently the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), which creates harmonized rules for a safe, predictable and trusted online environment where fundamental rights are effectively protected.

From a human rights perspective, this is a major step forward in protecting the rights of individuals and enabling fair digital spaces.

To sum up, the digitalisation of society raises crucial human rights issues. The *double face* of the Internet extends human rights on the one hand, especially when it comes to the manifestation of the individual thought, but on the other hand is capable of the worst, be it through spying, invasion of privacy or instrumental isation of data.

Photography Karl Visuals

Fake news is cheap to produce. Genuine journalism is expensive.

Toomas Hendrik Ilves

THE RISK OF NEWS

Felicia Nyman & Rebecca Slättås

Journalism is an essential part of keeping people informed and aware of recent events and the emergence of journalism has been intimately connected to the development of mass media. The method to spread news has come to include technological means such as tv, radio and the internet.

Journalism is an occurrece existing in most of the world with journalists covering news happening almost everywhere. But this work is not free of risks.

In some countries news contradicting the state can have consequences. In the case of restricting freedom of speech online, journalists risk being targeted with censorship, arrest, or the threat of violence by authorities. Using state-owned internet service providers to block politically sensitive news websites and harassment and arrest subjected to independent journalists working in online media are some of the occurrences that could be happening in countries where democratic functions are declining. Another aspect is the regulation of media by reinforcing the climate of self-censorship. One country where some of these experiences are reality is Venezuela. During the last several years there have been many happenings suggesting Venezuela's democratic declension.

In 2022 the country was classified as not free, with the score 30 out of 100 in Freedom House's yearly ranking of freedom on the net. The organization also states that websites and social media are restricted and blocked by the government. Journalists covering political events are said to be facing violence as well as family members of theirs.

In combination with these happenings there has also been a decline in the economic stability with the country going through recession and hyperinflation during recent years.

This has been affecting several functions, one of them being the quality of internet access. This is said to have resulted in frequent black outs during periods in several states.

During one time period of at least eight months there were regional blackouts which limited connectivity. The restriction of individuals' freedoms to express personal views has been taken in the form of strict control over telecommunication providers and cases where individuals have been targeted based on their social media activity. One example is during the state of emergency because of the covid-19 pandemic, the publication, sharing or questioning of officials or policies on social media was charged with incitement to crimes such as incitement to hatred.

Regulation of media by the government has been a part in leading to the practice of self-censorship. This has been reinforced by impunity to those who by retaliation have threatened or attacked journalists for their work. This has been affecting several functions, one of them being the quality of internet access. This is said to have resulted in frequent black outs during periods in several states. During one time period of at least eight months there were regional blackouts which limited connectivity. But as described earlier it is not only the quality of internet.

The restriction of individuals' freedoms to express personal views has been taken in the form of strict control over telecommunication providers and cases where individuals have been targeted based on their social media activity. One example is during the state of emergency because of the covid-19 pandemic, the publication, sharing or questioning of officials or policies on social media was charged with incitement to crimes such as incitement to hatred. Regulation of media by the government has been a part in leading to the practice of self-censorship. This has been reinforced by impunity to those who by retaliation have threatened or attacked journalists for their work.

NGO Espacio Público had an annual report (2021-2022) tracking free expression which stated that less than 40% of media reports on the political and economic crisis, in part because of the fear that there could be retaliation.

This is only an overview of the happenings in Venezuela and a bit of an insight on some aspects of the situation in relation to the work of journalists and individuals using social media and how these could be affected by surrounding factors such as restrictions, the economic situation and the political climate.

Iranians Activists Reality

Clarissa Moore
Photography Albert Stoynov & Artin Bakhan

For a long time, many women in Iran have cautiously tried to stop the regime's Hijab rules by showing strands of their hair to challenge the regulation. On September 13, Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, was arrested in Tehran for violating Iran's hijab rules. Three days later she was dead. Since then, videos of anti-regime demonstrations and acts of resistance have gone viral, leading to the government blocking internet access in parts of Tehran and Kurdistan. It is unclear at the time of writing how extensive the shutdown is. Harsh criticism is also directed at Meta (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram) which suspended a number of accounts that reported on the protests and police brutality against protesters. WhatsApp accounts with Iranian pho-ne numbers have also been shut down.

This is not the first time the Iranian regime has used blocking internet access for residents or shutting down the internet completely. Already in 2019 Iranian regime security forces killed 323 men, women and children during five days of protests in the country. Security forces unlawfully used lethal force against the vast majority of protesters and bystanders killed, shooting most in the head or torso, indicating intent to kill. Still, no one has been held responsible for the unlawful killings of the protesters in 2019.

An internet shutdown is not a new tactic to limit access to information. The UN's Human Rights Committee has declared that states ... must not block or impede internet access in relation to peaceful assemblies.' When the internet is shut down, not only do individuals risk losing contact, but the regime can get away with mass murder and other crimes such as could not happen in the light of the world's eyes this means that the lives of activists and protesters are in danger while the outside world has no real support. But states are increasingly doing just that in the past two years, states such as Myanmar, Sudan, Venezuela, Belarus and Ethiopia have limited or blocked access to the internet.

In Iran, as elsewhere, the shutdown not only limited access to information for people in the country, it also prevented them from being able to share information with the rest of the world, hindering research into human rights abuses and crimes committed, the identity of the perpetrators and the victims, and the real number of deaths.

This raises concerns among the outside world that again in 2022 the network is shutdown, families cannot get in touch with each other. The regime in Iran is now responding to the protests by shutting down the internet. The risk is great that widespread abuses will be committed when the world no longer knows what is happening, activists warn.

Photography Gayatri Malhotra

Social Media As A Means Of Revolutionary Political Change?

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Alva Barcheus

Today many activists, protestors and revolutionaries mobilize with the help of internet and social media.

The 2011 Arab Spring has been nicknamed the "Facebook Revolution" and the "Twitter Uprising". Massive protests are happening in Iran since the killing of Jina Mahsa Amini, we have all heard about the internet shutdowns and seen videos and political slogans on social media.

Internet and social media can in today's digital landscape be a crucial tool of mobilizing support for social causes, even create an atmosphere of revolution.

But it can also be used by repressive governments to suppress movements looking to change the status quo.

Massive protests are happening in Iran since the killing of Jina Mahsa Amini, we have all heard about the internet shutdowns and seen videos and political slogans on social media. Internet and social media can in today's digital landscape be a crucial tool of mobilizing support for social causes, even create an atmosphere of revolution. But it can also be used by repressive governments to suppress movements looking to change the status quo.

The Arab Spring became a struggle between religious elites trying to consolidate power and growing support for democracy. The results of the movement vary; Tunisia might be seen as the most successful example, we are seeing peaceful steps toward a constitutional democracy. But in many countries the democratic wave was temporary, leading to either a revival of extremism or swapping one dictatorship for another. What is clear is that digital platforms played a big role in planning and mobilizing protests, bringing people onto the streets and challenging the regimes. Digital communication channels are free to use and less controlled than traditional media.

> Social media platforms are open spaces without rules forcing you to stop posting or protesting.

It makes documentation and distributing information easily accessible, and messages can be shared and communicated across the entire world and mobilize international support. It has the strength of reducing vulnerability as regimes can't pinpoint one single target to repress with violence. But in the Arab Spring, governments widely used internet shutdowns to curb the protests. Egypt has been less successful than Tunisia. Several Egyptian regimes have replaced each other, becoming more brutal and less tolerant of protests and dialogue. This shows how social media can be a double-edged sword; the same digital platforms that first mobilized protests later became a brewing ground for misinformation and fragmented the movement,

diminishing their chances of popularly toppling the government. Of course the outcome in Egypt depended on many more factors, but it still exemplifies a general problem with "click bait activism". It requires binaries; a clear opponent, so an extremist faction of a movement can easily claim to represent the whole movement.

Not to mention the vulnerability to misinformation. Clickable, bite-sized Instagram slideshows simplifies and waters down complex issues, whose complexities need to be unuderstood to avoid misunderstandings, populism, and hollowing out of the seriousness of political messages. Algorithmic echo-chambers easily fuel misinformation and conspiracy theories, capable of resulting in storming of the U.S Capitol.

Social media can also be used to give marginalized peoples an opportunity for making their voices heard: an example comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Here, social media has become a platform for Congolese refugees to put attention to the issue of forced migration.

The movement is called Refugee Voices and utilized social media to spread awareness of their dire situation from their own perspective, in order to take control of the narrative and change the way refugees were viewed. They challenge the stereotypical image of refugees and Congolese diaspora as victimized and weak, to show the strength of their collective voice and call for deep political change in Congo. It's thus not only about the perhaps hollowed-out concept of "spreading awareness"; it can be a substantive means of giving a voice to the voiceless.

On the other hand, access to social media is an opportunity not everyone has. It's a matter of class and resources, both inside and between countries. Even though the price of internet access globally has declined, making it available for billions more people than two decades ago, many people live in "internet poverty". The World Bank estimates only 20-25% of the population of West Africa can afford internet (2021). In poor countries, internet access is very dependent on its price; India has cheap

internet and thus only 8% live in internet poverty, while Malawi, Venezuela and Madagascar have the highest prices in the world despite being some of the poorest countries. This obviously makes it difficult to be a political platform for the people.

Internet access can also be deliberately blocked in order to prevent social change. Internet censorship and surveillance can be a very effective tool of violent repression. The censorship policies of authoritarian states like China or Belarus are cases in point.

In Iran, the regime is using internet shutdowns to increase repression: an attempt to retain control over the brewing outrage since the killing of Jina Mahsa Amini. However, this is far from new for Iran. According to Amnesty and Reuters, in the 2019 protests Iranian government forces murdered 1,500 individuals under the cover of an internet shutdown, concealing wide human rights abuses. Iran had one of the the highest number of internet shutdowns last year. Right now they are selectively blocking access where their violence is most prominent, making it difficult to post evidence of the abuse online.

"This is the worst internet shutdown we have had in three years. It's absolute chaos; nothing works", 34-year-old Souzangar told Reuters. "I can't do my job, I can't talk to my loved ones, I can't even do a simple bank transaction on my phone". The Iranian regime is trying to stop protesters from reaching each other and stop information about the violence from reaching the outside world. A sophisticated surveillance system is being used to monitor Iranians outside of Iran too. Some people are using VPN to access global websites to communicate with each other, call for outside help, or simply hide from surveillance. Though, the connectivity is sporadic and not easily accessible. The regime aims to control information flows to safeguard its own power. Other regimes are drawing inspiration and developing their use of internet for repression too, such as Russia, China, Eritrea and Myanmar.

The wide pattern of authoritarian governments systematically using internet shutdowns and surveillance to suppress movements for social change is a serious threat to human rights and democracy.

Perhaps the narrative of the "Twitter Revolution" is a Westernized discourse, missing out on important problems with overestimating technology in social change. Political momentum is not inherent in digital technology; it's a tool, which can be used to strengthen both democracy and authoritarianism. Nevertheless, free and affordable internet is important for the freedom and human rights of all, and it's playing a crucial role in the struggle of challenging authoritarian regimes today.

Photography Markus Spiske

HUMAN RIGHTS

- Save our children
- Invest in our children
- Make our voice strong

FREEDOM

- Knowledge
- teach Morals, Morals.

BE Kind → BE HUMAN

Verbs: to help, to care, to Share

We are one

Integrity

- strive for PEACE.

A word from the President

Dear members of the Association of International Affairs in Umeå,

The end of the fall semester of 2022 is approaching, quickly. When I look back at the past months I can't help but feel joyful and exceptionally fortunate. I applied to the role of President with a vision of expanding the association, to alongside the board members become more active on campus and to become more visible and interactive with our members. To my astonishment we exceeded any expectations of mine, and during this semester we have not only been holding exciting lectures and fun social events - we have also launched our new podcast Inter-Pol, traveled to Dublin and Belfast, and published this issue of Utpost that you're holding in your hand right now. The UAIA board members, all of our committees, and our authors have done an incredible job and none of this would have been possible without you. I will be forever grateful for all of the work you've invested in this association, thank you!

Technological advances and the development of internet usage has contributed a lot to our everyday life. Maybe you're reading this paper online, or you've spoken to a friend or family member via social media or a video call, or maybe you've looked up a delicious recipe for some gingerbread cookies. The Internet has made our lives easier in a lot of ways. Although, it can also affect us in a larger sense, and not always in a good way. Elections can be tampered with, peace processes can be spoiled and it can be used as a way of warfare.

In this issue of Utpost you'll be able to read about several ways in which technological advances and the development of internet usage can be used to affect our societies. Personally I think this topic is very compelling and I hope you'll find it interesting as well. Enjoy your reading!

Your President,
Michaela Eriksson Viklund

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