Chapter 86

Impact and Potential of Emerging Technologies for Fostering Democracy

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, several case studies have appeared on how emerging technologies had an impact in bringing grass root political changes. It has been widely argued that emerging technologies are influencing democracy all over the world. This chapter explores how emerging technologies support various pillars of democracy (freedom of expression and freedom of press, rule of law, human rights, and individual liberty) to strengthen and foster the democratic processes. While there exist substantial evidence that technology provides strong support to democracy, significant issues still exist and need to be addressed for emerging technology to contribute to democracy. The chapter discusses these issues and offer recommendations for better use of emerging technologies for democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are profoundly affecting social, economic and political institutions worldwide, particularly in new and emerging democracies. For reformers and activists, these tools are indispensable to overcome resource disparities and entrenched monopolies of power and voice. The emerging technologies, including web 2.0 technologies, provides their users capability of instant communication with others and content publication that is accessible across borders. Individuals can use the technology to spread their own messages and make their previously silenced voices heard (Chadwick, 2008).

There exist various examples where technology has been used to foster democracy. These examples range from use of technology for promoting citizen advocacy to increasing government transparency and accountability. Public and private organizations, citizens, and politicians are using emerging technologies, including web technologies to enhance communication, improve access

to important information, and increase their efficiency. The natural outcome of such enhancements would be strengthened democratic processes and governance that is more effective.

The objective of this chapter is to explore the emerging technologies and their possible impact and potential for fostering democracy. The purpose of the discussion above was to provide a background of the chapter. Next, the chapter shall discuss the use of emerging technologies to foster democracy. Following this discussion, chapter shall explore the link between Leadership, Culture, and Technology. Following this discussion, the next sections will explore the impact and future potential of technologies on individual pillars of democracy. At the end, the chapter will provide implications and recommendations in order for emerging technologies to better support democracy and offer future research directions.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND DEMOCRACY

Emerging technologies refers to new technologies. These technologies are either currently developing or expected to be developed in the next five to ten years. Emerging technologies has the potential to bring significant changes in the current business and social environment. Some example of emerging technologies include information technology, on-demand printing, robotics, wireless data communication, and biotechnology (Business Dictionary, 2013).

The citizens in democratic societies already regulate emerging technologies through their votes and finance it through their taxes (Strandbakken, 2013). Science and technologies studies have been focused on emerging technologies and their interference with existing conditions of society and technology (Hess, 1997; Latour 2005). While the science and technology should be free, we see that use of technology for democracy is political and awkward and elected democratic governments

actually fund the scientific research. This shows that the present republic of science and technology is, at least to a certain degree, is politically controlled or contaminated. Making technology policy an fundamental part of the political debate is one way to democratize this republic of science and technology. The focus on politicizing science and technology clearly make emerging technologies more interesting than the already established and standardized ones (Akrich, 1992).

The positive visions and potential applications for emerging technologies are apparently without limits (Ratner & Ratner, 2003). Emerging technologies are expected to have a substantial influence on the everyday life of individual consumers and households (Ozin & Arsenault, 2006, p. 8). The public concerns about new technologies have strong political potential. One example is the debate about genetically modified crops (Burke, 2004).

There exist two ways emerging technologies can be used to reach people across borders. First by using pre-existing instruments (for example, YouTube and Flickr) and second by using online communities. In first method, we need to maximize the potential of these instruments to respond to the needs of target groups. In the second method, the online communities can be built using social networking tools. Multimedia tools can be very helpful to highlight the activities of various social groups, especially those that cannot be reached using other types of media. Many organizations have created groups on social media. One example is Burma Watch. This Facebook groups was developed to support the monks' protest in Burma. Another group called WLP Lebanon/CRTD.A was created to advocate for equality in citizenship laws of Lebanon. Oxfam, a worldwide development organization that mobilized the power of people against poverty, created Flickr photo pools to petition Starbucks to pay fair prices to Ethiopian coffee farmers. Another group called Nature Conservancy was created on Flickr to create awareness about conservation. Online social networks are an

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