

There are also significant differences. In Russia, the protest came to its active phase only in terms of local groups. Further events have proven both the unwillingness of our citizens to engage in real mass actions capable of putting OMON at a stand and the exaggerated significance of social media: they have rather been turned into a basis for rumours, provocation and mass hysteria than serving as a means of consolidation, organisation or information. The situation after the terrorist act in Domodedovo has largely confirmed this tendency.

The bottom line

The world has changed – namely in the sense that rumours now get reported and eyewitness reports have become readily available. Hectographed manuals for those in the underground are replaced by links to instructions of how to use proxy servers and how to perform a cyber attack against government servers. Internet memes can play the role of slogans (as markers), and the tradition of demonstrations has been enriched by flash-mob culture. Public demand can be easily monitored and analysed (in the ideal case, it can be effectively worked with). These changes also affect social processes that precede revolutions, accompany them, and specifically the ones surrounding and following them (information distribution internationally and its discussion).

However **with respect to revolutions, these are infrastructural changes. The internet does not construct them; neither does it form social demand for changes or their absence.** Just as it helps communication in the process of social splashes, it also serves as a distraction from it by virtualising people's actions. It is much easier to push the 'like' button and join a group than to print a leaflet and take to streets, or, at the very least, to tie a ribbon on the car antenna. On the whole, a virtual protest is close to attributive actions: by its cheapness of participation and audience appeal. And the **'participation' of crowds of people, which has become the parent of the 2.0 myth, is also the realisation of the demand for demonstration, which is much more universal than any social protest.** By the way, Egypt was not in the top ten Twitter topics and Twitter tags last week. The highest positions were occupied by the dismissed football presenter Andy Gray, Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber with the new 3D film 'Never Say Never'. ■

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CHEAP AND VERY ACCESSIBLE



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The key to the success of the new technologies amongst today's protesters is that they're very accessible, relatively cheap, and user-friendly. Even in countries like Egypt, where literacy rates and internet accessibility perhaps aren't that high, **just having a mobile phone and being able to take pictures or videos of what's happening during the day in real time is now very powerful for protesters**, a fact which has surely become problematic from the point of view of their political opponents. This is one of the first key differences between this technology and previous technologies. It is very mobile, very small, very easy to conceal, and very much integrated into the systems of commerce and systems of transnational organization. **The consumer value of the technologies meant they were open to use at the time of the protests by people who saw them for whatever reason they bought them.** There's that kind of relationship between massive proliferation and the consumer environment. Protesters were obviously using digital technologies to coordinate, and to share and publicize information. And there were a lot of uses – a lot of social media were used to promote negative views of the president of Tunisia and then Egypt, to complain about corruption, and to

detail issues that were causing public concern. These many uses of social media go hand in hand with the wider protest movements, and there is no doubt that people will continue to use the technologies and the materials available to them to protest and to organize protests.

The announcement of protest days or actions in Egypt appeared on Facebook and encouraged people to join the ongoing movement that quickly became very successful. **Twitter has also been used a lot to coordinate activities, much more on the day of protests and for mobilising people during the events.**

YouTube has also been a tremendous development for all sorts of protests, both long-term and short-term, especially since introducing the ability for users to upload films from their mobile phones almost instantaneously. **This has offered an invaluable opportunity for protesters to present a visual depiction of events before a global audience.** For example, the diffusion of the images of the street vendor who set himself on fire were extremely powerful for mobilizing public sentiment in Tunisia. We are now seeing this same mobilizing power of YouTube develop in Egypt and elsewhere in the world. ■