Co-ordination + Emotion

Marina Litvinovich

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In recent years we have been witnessing a clear trend of growing influence wielded by social networks because of their power to organise people into various communities. Due to such online social networks as Facebook, Twitter and some that are more locally oriented, like Odnoklassniky.ru (Classmates), **the process of uniting people who share common views and values in groups or communities is greatly accelerated.** Thanks to social networking, the coordination of these new communities is improving dramatically. And the same is true with regard to the speed at which information is disseminated. All of these elements certainly help to bring a completely new socio-political structure into being — one that is based on a kind of network organisation and self-organisation rather than political parties in the traditional sense of the term. This new factor will certainly play a leading role in the political sphere in the future.

Today we are witnessing the eclipse of the older 'broadcaster — recipients' scheme, which is typical of the television era, when the bulk of the population was merely consuming information transmitted by someone from the very top echelon. The new structure implies that the masses are becoming both the producers and the disseminators of information. **Online networks do not require a person to possess money or influence in order to spread something that is of significant interest to the public.** Moreover, unlike the old days, it also doesn't take much effort to disseminate info. If the content is challenging the status quo, it is rapidly disseminated throughout the internet as if it were doing so by itself. As a result, the number of people producing the content increases geometrically. And once the process is initiated there is really no way to stop it.

To produce challenging informational content is by no means difficult. One only needs to adhere to certain rules. **For instance, the content is more likely to be a success if it is delivered in a 'personal' way.** People also don't like be talked to in an academic style, with the inclusion of too much tedious statistical data. The audience wants emotions. **It needs personal attitude and likes to be fed information by a source that it trusts.** Another principle to be remembered is **always to adduce 'documents' (photos and videos included) when addressing some issue of popular concern.**

Finally, **those people who disseminate information have to fight — or at least appear to be fighting — for something that is in the public interest.** After all, their audience is keen to judge their motives. It always matters whether you are fighting for power, some personal interest, or for the public good, such as something that concerns and affects the lives of your fellow citizens. If the people suspect that you somehow directly gain from what you are doing, they will certainly lose all interest in you. I recall a story posted by some blogger and entitled 'go sleep in a chair'. It tells the story about how the blogger's wife that had to endure sleeping three weeks in a chair while tending to their sick child in Filatov's hospital. **The story was full of emotion and illustrated with many photos. In a matter of just three hours, this story was disseminated through various blogs, generating a great wave of protest.** It is obvious that people reacted so energetically to this because they wanted to protect themselves and their own children from the terrible conditions that one is likely to face in Russian hospitals.

However, all the political advantages offered by the internet are of a purely technological nature. To become something more, they also need an appropriate social environment and political conditions. People won't take to the streets simply because they were asked to do so via Twitter or social networks or blogs; it also takes certain popular feelings to trigger such action.

On the other hand, once people have taken to the streets, **Twitter and the like do help in performing two important tasks. Firstly, they provide for the rapid delivery and dissemination of information.** If we take the terrorist attack at Moscow's Domodedovo airport as an example, the first eye-witness video of the explosion appeared on Twitter in a matter of just 3 or 4 minutes. **Secondly, social networking helps to coordinate protesters on the ground.** After the events in Tunisia and Cairo, there remains no doubt about how effective Twitter can be in turning a crowd into a full-fledged movement. ■

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