Social Media as an Instrument of the Informational and Psychological Warfare: Some Practical Issues

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Abstracts: The paper devotes to the problem of the establishment of an effective control over the Internet. Basing on an example of North African countries (Tunisia, Libya and Egypt) the author evaluates the role of the Internet, especially such resources as Tweeter and Facebook, in the organization of protest movements in North Africa and in the reproach of the heads of those countries who used to be well-known and influential leaders in the Arab world. The author argues that each social media which is available anywhere were there are technological facilities still have owners who settle a kind of an information policy which is favorable for them and their country of origin, mainly the USA which would try to do their best to keep their place in the middle of the international informational superhighways. To our opinion it is the most serious threat for the world informational order which is under construction. That’s why the author comes to a conclusion that it is necessary to launch an effective intergovernmental management of the Internet with the involvement of all stakeholders. Only in that case it would become possible to save the national sovereignty and to withstand informational threats in the digital age.

Key words: Social media, information superhighways, information control, information security

It becomes evident that today there is coming up a new social order based on telecommunications. And the networking and data processing become key features of this new way of life. Herewith we are speaking about not only the quantitative growth of the information but the fact that it begins to play the key role in our
everyday life including leisure, business and government. The central place in this new system of public relations belongs to modern information and communication technologies.

So it is possible to say that today knowledge, information and information and communication technologies (ICT) become an inalienable part of an activity of a human being. That’s why nowadays one can observe the situation when the creation of the knowledge-based economy is turning into the main strategic priority of the policy of every State, both well-developed and developing one, which consider the ICT as an effective tool, which can ensure a sustainable social and economic growth and to solve almost all problems of the nation. So do the States of Sub-Saharan Africa. They consider the ICT as a “key weapon in war against world poverty. When used effectively, it offers huge potential to empower people in developing countries and disadvantaged communities to overcome development obstacles, address the most important social problems they face, and strengthen communities, democratic institutions, a free press and local economies” (Pitters, 2003, 28).

From the first view, information technologies really give great opportunities for the cooperation between different people or their professional groups and alliances. Due to the information and communication technologies there are reconfiguring different spheres of human activity: trade, finances, education. Finally information and communication technologies have played a significant role in the establishment of the modern global economic system by making possible the global division of labor. During last years they have started to implement those technologies to the everyday life of almost every person. Besides information and communication technologies unite and form the informational superhighways. And those states which are located on the middle of the information superhighways ensure the leadership in the digital age while other countries find themselves on the periphery of the global information and communication space.

So we come to the first challenge of the digital age – the problem of the digital divide which “separates those who can access and use ICT to gain these
benefits, and those who do not have access to technologies or cannot use it for one reason or another” (Pitters, 2003, 28). We can explain the nature of a digital divide as a situation where a class of informational reach people within the boundaries of the country and informational reach nations within the international community as a whole. They start using informational technologies and information as an effective instrument on preservation the control over the rest part of the world which one could define as an informational periphery and where there is living the vast majority of population. And every day “what has been called the ‘information gap’ may be widened, with those economically and educationally privileged able to extend their advantages by access to sophisticated information resources such as on-line databases and advanced computer communications facilities, while those towards the bottom of the class system are increasingly swamped by what Schiller has termed ‘garbage information’ which diverts, amuses and gossips, but offers little information of value” (Webster, 2006, 149). That’s why it is impossible to concern this new era as an age of a universal prosperity.

Besides it is necessary to keep in mind that information technologies when used effectively are able to destroy existing orders, to overthrow political regimes which used to be rather stable and influential in the world. That’s why it seems very important not only to create favorable conditions for the development of the ICT-sector in the country but also to identify and to think about how to react on the main challenges of the digital age related to the necessity of the defending of national interests in the field of information.

Thus it becomes clear why in the annual report published by the International Telecommunication Union there has appeared the new indicator of the measurement the ICT-readiness of different countries which measured the level of the cybersecurity by regions. According to the data produced by the experts of the International Telecommunication Union North America has the highest level of the cybersecurity. Then goes Australia, India, Brazil, Scandinavian countries, Europe, China and Russia. The vast majority of African countries are locating on
the last positions of the ranking which witnesses on the very low level of cybersecurity in Africa (see figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Global Cybersecurity Index.

![Global Cybersecurity Index](image)

*Source: Measuring the Information Society Report, 2015, 27*

The point stated above gives us an opportunity to conclude that when creating the ICT-infrastructure in the country and the promotion of the usage of the ICT by its citizens it is necessary to strengthen its informational security which becomes an inseparable part of national security.

Speaking on African countries we can say that during past decade there have been undertaken a number of attempts aimed on the creation of the ICT-sector and well-developed ICT-infrastructure in the region but they completely forgot on the strengthening of the informational security of the State.

In Africa the Programme of the development of optic-fiber communications has been adopted in the year 2003. This programme actually consists of two ones. The first is the Programme of the development of optic-fiber communications in East and South Africa and the second is aimed on the development of broad-band Internet in Western, Central and Northern parts of the continent. They were going to build more than 25 000 miles of optic-fiber lines all-over the continent (NEPAD E-Africa Commission).
Nowadays we can ascertain that the greatest part of these huge work aimed on the creation of the communicational backbone in Africa has been done. We can see very impressive geography of Pan African optic-fiber cable system that starts in Portugal than goes alongside the West African shore via Cape Town, than in Johannesburg they start the East African submarine cable system that goes alongside the East African shore through Mombasa (Kenya) via the Emirates. And it caused the significant reduction of the price of the Internet-connection in the vast majority of African countries.

As a result many Africans as soon as it’s become possible from the technological point of view go to the Internet and in their willingness to try something new begin to use the most popular Western social media such as Twitter and Facebook. “They feel that tweeting is something useful for speaking to unknown masses of people on the Internet. In contrast, they feel that Facebook is principally useful as a virtual site to address their own supporters” (Iwata, 2015, 68). And today there is observed the rapid growth of Twitters and Facebook accounts in Africa. According to official data there have been registered 124.5 million accounts on Facebook in Africa (Internet World Stats, 2015).

For example in Egypt the total amount of accounts on Facebook has reached 27 million by November 2015 (35% of population). In Tunisia the total quantity of Facebook accounts exceeded 5 million by November 15, 2015 (49% of population). In Libya social media are also rather popular. By the year 2015 there has been registered more then 2.4 million accounts on Facebook with a population of 6.4 million (Internet World Stats, 2015).

Among Sub-Saharan African countries it is Kenya which is using social media more actively. We can explain this situation by the well-thought governmental ICT-policy aimed on the penetration of the ICT deep into the country. Thus “Wi-Fi or 3G (4G) network-covered areas and spots have been rapidly spreading in the Kenya’s daily life: even in the commuter bus from and to Nairobi” (Iwata, 2015, 67).
But more often social media are used not as very effective mean of intercultural communication but as mind managers. For example political elites of African countries are using them when pursuing political goals during election period. And there is registered the growth of the number of tweets during the presidential campaigns. Among African political leaders P. Kagame, the President of Rwanda is the oldest blogger. He has launched his account on Twitter on May 2009. By the December 20, 2012 he had 90 000 of followers on Twitter. And by the year 2014 the number of followers exceeded 600 000. J. Kikwete, the President of Tanzania also has very good indicators. Initially (in 2011) he had 40 000 followers. By the year 2014 he had more than 190 000 followers. M. Marzouki, the President of Tunisia, has launched his account on March 2011. In the year 2012 he had more than 100 000 followers. By the end of the year 2014 this figure has exceeded 220 000. J. Zuma, South African President, has launched his account on May 2011. By the year 2012 the number of his followers on Twitter accounted 187 000. By the year 2014 the total quantity of followers exceeded 330 000. And finally J. Mohamma, the President of Ghana, who has launched his Twitter account only on July 2012, had more than 76 000 of followers by the year 2014. In comparison, in 2012 he had only 6 000 of followers (Iwata, 2015, 66).

So we can see that social media can be used as effective instruments of management of public opinion. Thus they pursue three main goals: involvement, communication and mobilization. The simple information of the population is not a mission of social media. They are used by African political leaders in order to increase the number of supporters. But at the same time they can be used in order to disrupt political regime as well. As an example we’d like to show protest movements which took place in North Africa starting from the January 2011. Those movements are known as an Arab Spring but they are also known as “tweeter revolutions” which witnesses the role of social media on the escalation of the social tension. Tweeter and Facebook which are rather popular in Africa served as a platform where one could find the call for organizing of mass protests.
Besides it is necessary to remind that there is no local social media in Africa. Tweeter and Facebook have their owners and their headquarters are located at the USA. So they organize their work according to American rules and regulations, they don’t obey the legislature of a country where they act and don’t filter the content. They explain their policy by the principal of the freedom of speech.

Political leaders of North African countries have realized the threat which went from social media. For example on March 2011 in Egypt there has been closed an access to the Internet for three days but it was completely impossible to improve the situation.

Basing on the example of North African countries we can come to a conclusion that social media can serve as a very effective instrument of quick mobilization of a great number of people even in countries with more or less stable political regimes. And it seems to be impossible to control those resources.

As an example we’d like to show a film the “Innocence of Muslims” which has been published on YouTube on 2012. The appearance of this film caused a new wave of protest movements in Arab countries especially in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. As a result in Bengasi there has been killed a US ambassador in Libya Christopher Stivens.

But American corporation Google, an owner of YouTube has refused to delete the film by explaining its position by the necessity to follow the principal of the freedom of speech. But at the same time American corporation has forgotten another basic principal which also seemed to be very important – a principal of respect of other cultures and beliefs.

In current circumstances it is possible to recognize that an informational warfare has been completely lost by North African countries. To our opinion political leaders of those countries could succeed in this warfare if only they had a strong support by their citizenry which would be indifferent for the call for protest which has been spread by social media. Unfortunately they underestimated the influence, importance and power of social media.
Despite more or less high level of the social and economic development in comparison with other African countries there were a great number of dissatisfied in North Africa. And this dissatisfaction has been stirred up by social media. So it is necessary to think about how to overcome this challenge and to put an effective control over social media and other digital content.

As it is known China is implementing the toughest informational policy at the field of the regulation over the digital content. Any information related to the criticism of the Chinese communist party, the highlighting of technological catastrophes, natural disasters, or epidemics or anniversary of protest movements is forbidden. All informational portals are controlled especially those which are specialized on the highlighting of political events. The access to the resources where is located a forbidden content blocks in few minutes. As soon as Tweeter, Facebook or YouTube also can represent a threat for the stability of a political regime the access to those resources is closed in China.

Basing on the Chinese example one can pose a question whether such tough policy is reasonable or not. To our opinion it depends on the country. The vast majority of Chinese supports their political regime and understands the necessity of such measures.

The situation in North Africa is completely different. People in those countries have found themselves alone with foreign Internet-resources and step by step began to believe in the information published by western social media and aimed on the compromise of the political leaders of those countries.

Thus basing on the facts stated above it is possible to make a conclusion that informational networks and social media represent a real threat for the national security of the State. The efficiency of the overcoming of such challenges strictly depends on the elaboration of well-thought national informational policy and the level of the informational culture of the society. And it remains very low in Africa. It means that African countries will become objects of information expansion and information aggression of well-developed nations – leaders in the global production of the information in the future.
Reference list


