

Reading the Riots - What were the Police doing on Twitter (Alex Voss)

It could be argued that sources such as twitter and other online content were both a benefit and a setback during the London Riots which later expanded outwards to other major cities across England and to a lesser extent to the rest of the United Kingdom.

Whilst it had been argued by some that the main issue for keeping sites such as Twitter and Facebook active was that they were being used to co-ordinate the movements of rioters in order to achieve maximum impact from the damage being caused.

However, this also became of benefit to the police who were then able to use the data on such an open forum in order to mobilise troops to counteract potentially serious crimes - in essence managing to save lives of those who were innocent bystanders to rioters setting buildings alight.

Many senior politicians and onlookers later reflected on the fact that whilst there was no doubt that engagement through social media had been vital, it had also caused numerous problems due to false information being given in a deliberate attempt to create confusion and subterfuge within the Metropolitan Police Force.

The main highlight of this article was that as content on platforms such as Twitter is not filtered and anyone can contribute to it, there is in essence a need for Big Data style trawling and complex research into how to make better use of available resources without encroaching on the privacy of those involved.

BBC Arabic, Social Media and Citizen Production: An Experiment in Digital Democracy before the Arab Spring (Marie Gillespie)

From the outset, it is made clear that to engage with members of the public casually on such a level can in bad situations lead to significant reductions in the reliability and trustworthiness of a network - something that is vital particularly to broadcasting and media outlets such as BBC Arabic.

Despite what some had argued it to be a success for changing the way people engage with current affairs, mid season it was pulled in 2011, due to the political nature of the debating format and amid concerns that it was in fact aiding in the fuelling of resentment that would eventually lead to the beginning of the Arab Spring. Whilst there is still some uncertainty at the time of writing about the true reasons that the platform was pulled - some, including Gillespie, argue that it was in fact withdrawn by the BBC in order to protect those who had been interacting with the show in order to keep identities safe and in order to prevent the social media feeds from being used by domestic governments to track down and interrogate those whom they believed to be suspects.

More abstractly however, the platform was designed to create what was deemed "Global Conversations" in order to engage with different viewpoints not just across the middle east but also to a lesser extent to the rest of the world. However, the issue that arose was that whilst the show did seem to cater to a rather niche market, since there was a need to be able to respond to live data in real time there was a massive outlay of resources to be able to trace back the information to ensure that there was no clear falsification or bias being portrayed that could damage the reputation of the station.

Digital Democracy: Reimagining Pathways to Political Participation (Homero Gil de Zúñiga , Aaron Veenstra , Emily Vraga & Dhavan Shah)

Written in 2010, this article looks at the state of political engagement in the United States of America as far back as the 2004 Presidential Debates. It begins with a contrast of what is seen as 'traditional' campaigning and political participation from "voting, campaign activity, contacting officials, and collective activities. " However it makes note of the fact that with the rise of the internet in the middle if the 00's that this is no longer sufficient but made the contesting remark that whilst this may be the case, many outlets and academics still did not consider online activity to be worthy of being included under political activism.

Over the years, it became identified that through new online outlets it provided the ability to create various forms of communication varying from one-to-one online messages to massive one-to-many campaign promotional materials such as through use of videos on YouTube and advertised video messages that could be easily shared to increase a sense of political awareness.

However, there is the case made that whilst the increased access to materials online as opposed to having to wait for them to be delivered can create a sense of increased participation, it also creates the issue that there are vast quantities of data which can often just reinforce your own personal biases without actually adding to the debate or that you feel a sense that you are more politically engaged and yet do not then go out and actually participate in the true sense of democracy by going to the ballot and making your choice. There is of yet no clear explanation but there does seem to be a clear dividing line in that the more you engage with the traditional methods of engagement, the less inclined you are to also take it up onlin, as shown in the table below

TABLE 1. Factor Analysis Participatory Criterion Variables

	I	II
	Offline political participation	Online expressive participation
Attended a political meeting, rally, or speech	.864	.216
Worked for a political party or candidate	.869	.176
Contributed money to a political campaign	.706	.319
Sent an e-mail to an editor of a newspaper/magazine	.204	.788
Used e-mail to contact a politician	.282	.840
Signed an online petition	.195	.777
Eigenvalues	3.328	1.016
% Variance	55.4%	16.3%
(Total = 72.3%)		

Note: Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. Primary loading of a variable on a factor is indicated by boldface type. N = 3,416.

The Tao of Singapore's Internet politics (Gerald Sussman)

Sussman makes the case that in contrast to what you may assume from Singapore's free trade markets and liberal ideas - that its online presence is actually a very different case altogether. There are serious constraints on what you are able to access and for what purposes you can use the internet for.

Such limitations include examples such as 'Internet users are forbidden to post material that is *'objectionable on the grounds of public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony, or is otherwise prohibited by applicable Singapore laws', including 'material [that] advocates homosexuality or lesbianism'*

In addition, more stringent rules were introduced in 2001 that in essence prevent the posting of political materials online either for promotion or in order to try and analyse the mood of the nation so as to prevent major changes in the government and the ruling parties. Whilst there are no cases of restricted democratic rights such as in the Chinese state, there do seem to be clear desires to dampen any prospect of increased democratic outcome in fears of what it may produce.

However, it has to be noted that in more recent years, there have been increased pushes to re-open online democracy to the people and that as traditional media outlets begin to falter Singapore will go one of two ways - that there will be an opening of new media that is free of stringent regulations OR that as its power over the tradition diminishes, that the leading PAP (Peoples Action Party) would attempt to tighten its grip over the new technologies that continue to rise every day.

Digital Democracy within the European Union (Antti Timonen)

The European Union and its nation members seem to be one of the best cases of why Digital Engagement has been a positive outcome on democracy as a whole and yet there are still many reasons as to why it could be improved on further still.

In Finland, the Finns Party (often seen as populist) had not received a large share of the votes for the best part of 40 years when in 2011 through a series of well co-ordinated online campaigns they were able to massively increase vote share and as a result became the third largest party in the Finnish Parliament and capable of being part of the new coalition government should they have wanted to.

Due to the nature of the European Parliament, social media and increased digital democracy is also used by those such as PES (Party of European socialists) and its sister parties such as UK Labour to work cross borders to campaign on issues that do not end on a dotted line on a map - their most effective campaign to date being their work on raising awareness of tax avoidance and evasion and in the run up to the 2009 elections were able to repeat messages over and over so that by the time of the election, it was clear on what issues they were standing for election. Through this there were increased numbers elected and subsequently greater collaboration able to take place as a result.

Various EU states also take a different perspective of what digital democracy means. For example, in Estonia it is literal in the fact that there are now options to vote either online or via SMS from your mobile phone. It is estimated at the time of publication that roughly 25% of all ballots cast in their most recent election were done in this fashion