**New Social Movements and Effective Mobilization of People**

**Laknath Gunathilake**

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**Introduction**

With public discontent rising over issues such as intolerable corruption, and the absence of democracy, a new wave of collective action is forming up in various corners of the world, demanding real change and a just society. The Arab spring in 2011 and subsequent revolutions in the Middle East such as the Tahrir square protests inspired people to use similar models, to seek change by utilizing modern technology to seek answers to common grievances. The Occupy Wall street movement which began in Zuccotti Park New York has spread across many cities within the US and around the globe, and is seen today as a force to reckon with; In fact the movement today is referred to as the “occupy movement” as it has transgressed national boundaries.

The research paper hopes to examine some of the common characteristics of modern or New Social Movements, and analyze strategies employed in recruitment, and mobilization of members. The paper also hopes to answer two main questions. First, whether information and communication technology in the form of social media plays a role in mobilizing people for collective action, and secondly if contextual factors present, pertaining to the specific movement has an effect. The paper also hopes to examine the active role played by both these variables and seek answers as to which variable has a more active and influencing role. The paper would also seek to understand the role of the internet and social media in connecting and expanding social movements across borders making it an issue of international importance. The paper would also dedicate a considerable amount of analysis in defining some of the key concepts of the topic, especially with regards to “New” social movements, and mobilizing strategies.

The paper would draw its principal inspiration from the recently concluded Egyptian revolution and the ongoing Occupy Wall Street movement, while making occasional references to other historical social movements for the purpose of comparison.

**Literature Review**

**New Social Movements**

It is important that we understand and clarify the term “New Social Movement” in order to avoid future complications of the notion. The emergence of social movements can be understood as a historical phenomenon, with collective action taking a center stage during the early years of the 21st century. The Civil Rights movement and the Hippie movement all fall under the broader category of social movements, but fail to qualify as “New Social movements”. Thus it is vital that we make a clear distinction between the broader category of “Social Movements” and “New Social Movements”

According to Morris (1992) common characteristics of new social movements are categorized under four main criteria’. They are goal orientation, forms, participation and values. An example for the first differing criteria could be understood with regards to the traditional labor movements. While most traditional labor movements in the past sought wage increases or social security benefits, most new social movements with similar structures share different aspirations, such as workplace equality of sexes or the establishment of alternative economic institutions to help fulfill long-term job security.

According to De Anier (1990) Understanding differences between the “old”/ “traditional” social movements and “new” social movements would also be easier by contrasting their hierarchical structure and form. Most “old” social movements embraced the idea of leadership roles, with consensual and centralized decision making by a selected few members, while new social movements have adopted a leaderless horizontal structure by employing an organizational format they refer to as the people’s assembly. The decision making mechanism is purely based on what the occupy movement refers to as the “collective construction of a solution to a common problem” In understanding the notion of participation as a differing characteristic between “new” and “old” social movements’, one of the most common characteristic is the elimination of class cleavages. However it is also interesting to note that most members who take part in new social movements have acknowledged themselves to represent the middle class, or in the case of the occupy moment “the 99 percent”.

According to Morris (1992) the final and most important attribute in defining new social movements is by understanding the values represented by them. A common distinctions made in this regard is to say, that new social movements represent “non materialistic intangible and qualitative values such as personal autonomy, self actualization, and democracy, unlike their predecessors” (Morris 1992, 5)

**Mobilization**

First it is imperative that we understand the idea of political Mobilization within the given context, as it is one of the most important attributes of this paper. Mobilization as a general definition could simply mean an act of participatory politics. Mobilization of the masses is an essential factor for the success of any social movement, and the idea of mobilization is essentially derived from the general idea of political participation, According to Niven (2004) it is important that we distinguish political mobilization within the social movement context, to that of a voter turnout context since the later has a higher propensity and a lower risk factor compared to the earlier notion.

According to Niven (2004) the essence of mobilization theory posits the fact that increased access to political information increases political participation within the cognitive and behavioral contexts. This promulgate the idea that increased awareness leads to more discussion and analysis which makes mobilization more effective

Niven (2004) states, that with regards to the cognitive approach, two factors effect political mobilization, which is the accessibility of a message and the capacity to understand. However despite this notion, further research has proven that an attitude of a person is essential for political mobilization. For instance Victoria (2009) says that the mobilization effects will be low on people who are completely disengaged from politics, and with a low propensity towards agents of political socialization.

It is also necessary at this point to clarify, what is meant by mobilization, is not only the mobilization of people, but the overall mobilization of resources required for the success of a given social movement. According to Passy (2004) this means several factors such as the mobilization of Knowledge and technology. This aspect encompasses the idea of the importance of information technology and related social media; In fact more focus will be directed towards understanding this aspect within our discussion in the analysis stage by comparing the role played the internet and associated social media for the overall success of the movement. Passy (2004) further notes that another important mobilization resource that should be understood within the context is the idea of monetary resources and time: This talks about how social movements utilize funds and increase voluntary participation within the given context. This could be used to understand how social movements seek donations, increase volunteers to carry out daily operational work or in simple encourage protestors to come down to the street and join collective action.

**The Role of Information Technology**

Information technology as we mentioned earlier, may be understood as an important mobilization mechanism, and fall under the broader category of mobilization technology. The research paper in this regard would specifically focus on the role of the internet and how it has emerged as a popular venue for political participation with social media websites such as Face book, Twitter and YouTube becoming increasingly popular among the masses. Within the same context new social movements have also utilized the internet as a platform to launch their respective websites. For example the occupy Wall street movement has a dedicated website with regular updates on the events across protest venues and videos being uploaded via the YouTube. The website is also used to raise funds by means of donations, while using it as a platform for people with similar interests and grievances to discuss and debate on issues pertaining to the movement.

**Previous Research on the Subject**

Even though much research has been dedicated to the study of social movements and separate studies have been carried out with regards to the understanding of political mobilization and collective action, very little has been done to fuse the two ideas, especially within the new social movement context. This lack of research in the area could also be attributed to the fact that the shape and form of new social movements is an ever evolving phenomenon. The importance of further research in to the subject should be encouraged for several reasons; emerging social movements have triggered a domino trend, with many new movements using previous movements as an inspiration[[1]](#footnote-1), understanding the behavioral mechanisms and strategies employed by these social movements can be used as evidence to extrapolate their future actions, thereby avoiding potential conflict. Finally a comprehensive understanding of these movements may help governments to seek out solutions for their grievances and avoid future resurgences.

**Analysis**

This section deals with the principal argument of the paper which posits the idea, that despite the existence of grievances within the public sphere, the emergence and subsequent success of new social movements are specifically attributed to the effective use of mobilizing strategies. However this argument does not hope to negate the fact that existing grievances fail to play a role toward the success of new social movements, instead it hopes to show the importance of mobilizing strategies with a specific focus on the role of knowledge and Technology.

**Occupy Movement**

According to our model, the existence of grievances is a sufficient and necessary consideration for the success of a social movement, and the first part of this topic would focus on some of the grievances cited by the Occupy Movement. However the paper would not go on to justify the claims of any of the demands made by the protestors as it is beyond the scope of the topic. The principal grievance cited by the occupy protestors, “is the corrosive nature of cooperate greed and the victimization of the masses by large multinational banks and financial conglomerates”. On a more specific note, the occupy Wall Street protestors raise allegations over some of these institutions for triggering and creating the global recession. However despite the claims made by occupy protestors, it is commonly understood that the rising unemployment rate, and increasing dissatisfaction over corruption and cooperate malpractices have become a common theme among the occupy movement.

The important question to be answered in this regard is to understand which variable plays a more active and explicit role in the success of these movements. One of the key determinants of success as we noted earlier is the effective use of mobilization technology, and more importantly the mobilization of knowledge and technology. The Occupy movement maintains a dedicated website which acts a cohesive platform to link all international Protests and act as a knowledge hub. The website provides up to date information and contact details in the form of web links of all occupy movements that are taking place around the globe, and maintains a comprehensive section to educate and promote potential movements by linking up communities and members who are willing to start their own protest. In fact a separate website is maintained for this purpose under the URL of [www.Interoccupy.org](http://www.Interoccupy.org) which holds weekly conference over the internet every Monday night with the aid of Maestro conference call technology allowing over 500 people to communicate over a single channel. The occupy movement also uses Twitter extensively to communicate short messages regarding daily happenings and developments on related news stories, while using Face Book to spread fan activism, and inform the public about any new developments.

These factors holds true with regards to the cognitive approach which states that “the accessibility and understandability of a message is imperative towards helping mobilization “Morris (1992). In fact the extensive use of social media to convey messages to the public has become a success story. An extension of the same theory posits the idea that the level of political socialization and engagement also acts as a factor towards mobility, and this in turn can be used to prove that people are become increasingly informed about the political world with information dispersion within social media networks.

Another point which can be used to prove the point that mobilization strategies play a more active role than existing grievances is to show the increasing rate at which the occupy movement is spreading across the globe, in fact mobilizing technologies have created a grievance linkage, among the masses who share common motives and seek common answers.

**Tahrir Square Protest**

The revolution in Egypt came to be with a set of clearly defined grievances which included the absence of democratic institutions, freedom of speech, continuing police brutality, and the existence of emergency law. The uprising was calling for an end to Hosni Mubarak’s regime, and achieved its initial objective of ousting him on the 11th of February 2011.

Thus it is quite apparent that it fits the first scenario of existing grievances playing an important role, and it could also make an individual, to misleadingly assume that the first variable has a more influencing role. However this misconception can be clarified by looking at the use of mobilization methods used by the protestors and seeking an evaluation as to which variable plays a bigger role.

The use of Mobilization technologies were apparent within the Egyptian context as large amounts of people were seen flocking in to city centers demanding an end to Mubarak. However questions have been raised with regards to the effectiveness of these mobilization technologies especially since critics claim that the general public places very little trust upon these websites. The counter argument in this regards is based on the assumption that even thought a majority may place little trust upon the online news and information sources, the extensive use of these sources by international media may have reversed the earlier distrust.

One of the prominent social media sources during the Tahrir square protest was the face book group “We are Khaled said”. The page created by Wael Ghonim was named after a young Egyptian who was tortured to death by the Egyptian police in Alexandria. The page attracted thousands of online fans and was considered the first dissident website to have sparked a large scale mobilization of people.

In this instance again we could use the recurring idea of the cognitive approach to prove how the accessibility and understandability of a message makes mobilization effective. The news on the death of Khaled Said made an important impact upon the public as it was widely available on the social media pages on face book, and the sharing of the news made it spread across a wide audiences within a short span of time. Another important element in social media is its ability to share a news story or a fan page which makes it accessible to a large audience and this in turn helped the process.

Moreover the fact that Khaled was a young protestor could have appealed to the mass audience of social media users who in turn comprised of youth. On a separate note it is also interesting to see how the demography of the protestors consisted mainly of the youth. This in turn could be discussed as a separate research topic on whether it was the accessibility and availability of information more towards the youth population which spurred the movement more along the youth populous.

Furthermore if we look at the second factor which talks about the role of political socialization and engagement with the political world it is easy to make an assumption that continuous repression and dissatisfaction over the Mubarak regime had created a buildup of dissent among the general populous. Existence of political dissent proves public engagement with the political world, and this in turn could be interpreted as a contributory factor in the mobilization mechanism.

**Conclusion**

The entire discussion of the paper deals with two main elements, and two variables which act as contributory factors. New social movements and the successful outcomes of these movements in achieving their stated objectives are the two elements while the existence of grievances within the given context and the effective utilization of mobilization resources may be understood as the two contributory variables.

The principal analysis of the paper dealt with understanding which of the two contributory variables play a more active role in shaping the success of the outcomes of New Social movements. Evidence suggested the existence of common grievances, and the effective use of mobilization of resources in both examples. However it was evident that the existence of grievances alone was not enough for the success of the movement.

An extension of this argument could also be used to assess the magnitude of the two variables in a hypothetical scenario. If the existing grievance is of a higher magnitude, but the mobilization process employed by the social movement takes a lackluster pace, the outcome of the social movement would be an inevitable failure. However if in another scenario the existing grievance is of a lesser magnitude but the social movement employs a dynamic and effective mobilization mechanism, the outcome of the movement would be a success. Thus the crux of the argument is to say that, what matters in the end is what is made out of the existing grievance and not the grievance itself.

A larger implication of these findings would predict that the existing trend of new social movements would continue at an exponential pace with more people understanding the effectiveness of mobilization technology and using it to address common grievances despite their magnitude. Thus it is imperative that further research be conducted on the field on mobilization mechanisms to understand future trends to understand and extrapolate future behavior of new social movements.

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1. This is specifically cited in the occupy wall street website “*We are using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to* maximize *the safety of all participants*" [↑](#footnote-ref-1)