



## DPI Brief: New Media

'New Media' is the term used to denote an emerging range of means of mass communication via the internet, including Facebook, Twitter, and microblogging platforms such as Tumblr. Since the emergence of New Media during the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this phenomenon has been observed to play a pivotal part in political dialogue and democratic transition globally, especially amongst (but not limited to) youth; a trend which is likely to continue as internet penetration gathers pace worldwide.

Examples of events in which new media has played a key role include:

- **Egypt:** social media played a key role in the events of 2011, when large protests led to the collapse of the Mubarak government. Since then, social media has been a key medium for activists to organise, mobilise support, and draw attention to human rights abuses.
- **Ukraine:** the unrest in Ukraine during the spring of 2014, involving a series of riots which left scores dead, was vigorously documented across new media. Particular attention has been drawn to the way in which different groups used social media to publicise competing narratives surrounding events.<sup>1</sup>
- **Hong Kong:** The 2014 protests over controversial new legislation gained momentum following widespread discussion and documentation over new media, with Twitter reporting that over 1.3 million tweets about Hong Kong were recorded during the beginning days of the 'Umbrella Movement'.<sup>2</sup>

During a recent DPI guest lecture delivered by an Egyptian activist and researcher – with first hand experience of using social media tools during periods of political transition – the potential of New Media in opening up a 'new public sphere' was discussed. The speaker suggested that in countries like Egypt, where the traditional media has historically been tightly controlled, New Media can be a

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<sup>1</sup> See National Geographic reporting, May 2014: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/05/140510-ukraine-odessa-russia-kiev-twitter-world/>

<sup>2</sup> See reporting by Wall Street Journal, October 2014, 'Hong Kong Protests: How They Unfolded on Twitter': <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/10/01/hong-kong-protests-how-they-unfolded-on-twitter/>

helpful ‘means of communication away from the government’, providing a space for alternative discourses and discussions about democratic progress and human rights. While New Media cannot in itself spark a movement or bring about democratic change, it has the potential to help civil society to coordinate their activities more effectively, whilst also providing a platform for inclusive debate. The guest speaker also suggested that New Media can provide civil society actors with a certain level of protection. When civil society efforts aimed at democratic advancement are publicised online to a global audience, some governments may think twice before taking action against them as they know that ‘the world is watching’.

Understanding the role of new media and its potential to influence the political arena is likely to become increasingly important within conflict resolution and democratic transition processes. Acknowledging that the role of new media, a rapidly growing and changing space, still remains uncertain, the Democratic Progress Institute welcomes discussion into this promising field of enquiry and continues to carry out research and activities in this area of focus.

For further reading on the subject of new media and the role of media in general in conflict resolution and democratic transition processes, see the following DPI publications:

<http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/New-Media-Paper-ENGLISH-VERSION.pdf>

<http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Language-Roundtable-Report-2014-1.2.pdf>

[http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/MardinReport\\_Relationship-State-Media\\_PROOF1\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/MardinReport_Relationship-State-Media_PROOF1_WEB.pdf)

<http://www.democraticprogress.org/publications/the-relationship-between-state-and-media-and-its-effect-on-conflict-resolution-29-june-2013/>

<http://www.democraticprogress.org/publications/the-role-of-local-media-in-conflict-resolution-roundtable-meeting-istanbul-14th-november-2012/>

This topic is also addressed in a number of DPI’s comparative study visits. Reports of all visits can be found on our website: [www.democraticprogress.org](http://www.democraticprogress.org)