

**Text, Textuality and Digital Media**  
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**Lecture 30**

**Zeynep Tufekci: Twitter and Facebook Part I**

One of the important feature of digital literacy, digital communication is that the content can also be user generated, or in web 2.0, the content is user-generated. Though the user does not have the say over the content, rarely does. Even in the case of print as we have seen the author rarely has a say over the content beyond the point once the author has sold the copyright or signed off the copyright to the publisher. The author only retains a moral right and no commercial right. Whereas in the case of the digital media platforms, especially the social media, where there is user-generated content, if you read some of the terms and conditions that users are required to sign when one is registering for a particular service, if you read them closely then you find that there's very little right that the user actually has over the way that particular content is presented and how it is presented.

Only this morning, I was reading about a particular app which has gone viral on the internet, on the social media. This is an app that shows if you hold it before your face, before yourself and take a selfie it will show you what you're going to look like when you are very old. And so, someone looked at the agreement, the user agreement very closely, and there it says that particular app now has the right to do whatever with that image to give it over to anybody for advertisement for whatever purposes and even include personal information in that and that would be absolutely legal because you have agreed to the terms and conditions to the app as it is and most of us rarely actually take these agreements seriously.

There are millions and millions of users of these various content sharing and messaging groups and platforms and what we are going to study today is some of the political implications of the way this content is produced the platform it is produced on.

So we had earlier discussed that, the point about the digital media, the digital communication is that the genre of communication is fixed by the platform. So you have a particular way of writing, particular way of operating for Facebook, another way of operating for Twitter, another way of operating for let us say whatsapp and usually you have to reframe the content if you're going to share it across the platforms and the rules are set by the platform owner. Whereas in the case of print, usually newspapers articles would by and large be the same. There will be some stylistic differences, but no formal differences that there would be. And

this has great implications because, one, the form is being defined by the platform provider, who also being the owner of the platform becomes owner of all content, really has control over all content is what I mean, and that has some serious political implications.

So we are looking at this by one particular portion of Zeynep Tufekci's book, wonderful book, please go and read it freely available, *Twitter and Tear Gas*. In this book, Zeynep Tufekci's, it looks at certain political movements and how social media has been used in these political movements. Now those of you who follow the role of social media in political movements would know that, there was a point of time from the 2010-11, or indeed from 2008-09, when the internet became a very important resource through which people mobilized for political movements. The case in point maybe that there was the occupy wall street movement which began with lots of bloggers and lot of information posters, so that was not yet the age of social media.

But already the blogosphere was taking over the internet and emails helped people coordinate a lot of things when the occupy was happening. How people are going to actually provide rations and also provide medical care and various other things is something that was organized through the internet, so internet became a very important resource for people to communicate.

People did not have to depend on the larger communication media, they could have their own sources of information. In fact, this is actually true for all political movements. If anybody studies internationally, historically in the 20th century various mass movements, if one goes back to; say the unrest in the 1960s. And 1968 was a very important year of student movements as well as the movement against the Vietnam War.

In each of those movements lots of people come onto the street and participate in exercises which actually threaten the President of the government of the day, and it sometimes leads to very substantial changes and we find that in each of these cases the state media or even the media owned by the large corporates would not be interested in giving a voice to these movements and instead the movements themselves form their own ways of passing information among each other and theater plays a very important role.

Those of you who know about the Italian play writer Dario Fo would know that he created a play called *The Accidental Death of An Anarchist*, which actually was a play which was created during a protest movement, a sort of a mass movement against the arrests of certain

journalists who exposed the custodial killing of the of an anarchist in Italy. And in order to counter the official spin that was being provided by the media, the theater groups, Dario Fo and his colleagues enacted performed certain episodes from the courtroom drama that was happening and that drew into a play. And the theater then becomes an important source through which an alternative for information is passed on to the people participating in the protest movement.

That space is always required when groups of people who come out on the streets and try to force the powerful to change their ways. And in present day, of course what we find is that other than theatre, the social media plays a very important role in that and we also talked about the occupy wall street movement. We we can also talk about the Arab spring, this series of uprisings scenarios across the Arab world beginning from Egypt where the regime of Hosni Mubarak was overturned. He was forced to leave his office, and that was a movement in which many people found social media, Twitter played, Facebook page played a very important role in mobilizing people.

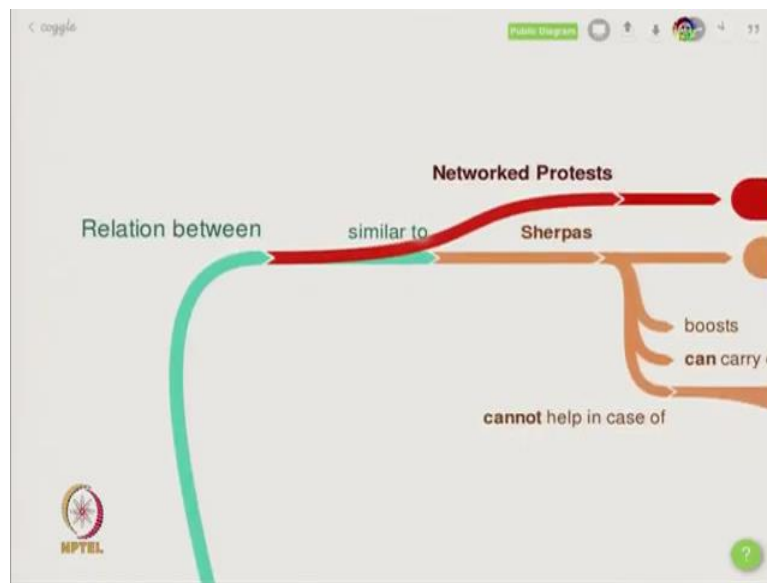
So the question really is that were these movements leaderless? Was there an organization or was it merely organized through social media? So can social media substitute the need for larger organizations? As we understand in the history of India we had a very important organization led movement for independence, The Indian National Congress played a very important role, there were of course other actors who ideologically where opposed to the Indian National Congress, Subash Chandra Bose, and also there were the communists and larger revolutionary organizations. And specifically in Bengal, there was the Gadar party.

There were these important organizations which articulated some of the demands for independence or the paths of independence. They may have been ideologically opposed to each other, certainly the Indian National Congress was the most important organization and it is this organization that helped bring together the kind of resources that could actually mobilize people and turn them out against the British to lead to significant political change.

And I would also like to remind you about the point about the church and Martin Luther. How till the coming of print it was the Roman Catholic Church, which had its network and could quell any any rebellion that could be there in Europe by pulling resources from elsewhere. But with the coming of print, resources went into the hands of the rebels and the church found it difficult to defend that situation.

So print played a certain role in building organizations and countering the traditional ecclesiastical organizations. But what we find is that with the Arab Spring and with several similar movements, there was a possibility that, there would be large masses of people who would come out on the streets because the message would go viral and it becomes an outpouring of discontent and then the government is unable to control it anymore and this really is a leaderless a kind of organization less, what seems to be, which may not actually be true, but it seems to be that this kind of a movement is there.

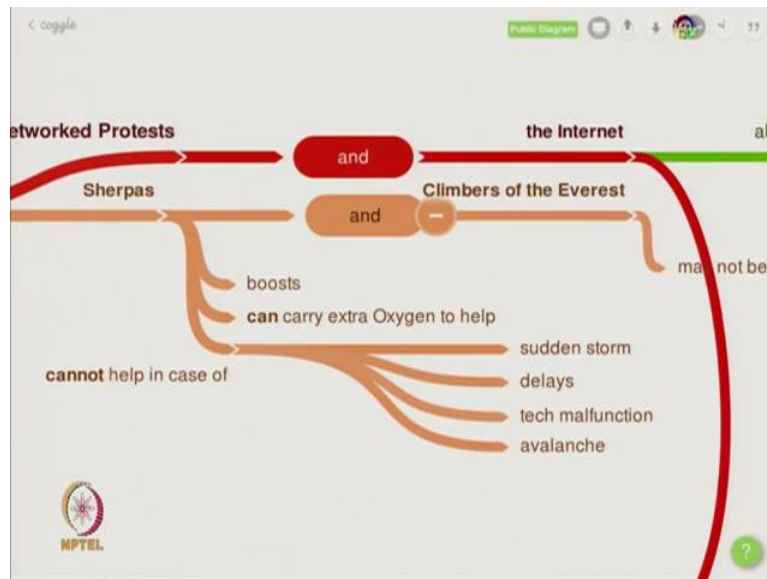
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But when Zeynep Tufekci; looks at this particular phenomena in her book, she is looking at a later phenomenon where her basic study is based on the movement in Turkey especially and in other parts of the world as well where we find that the governments have started to learn how to handle social media then studied the social media. And she looks at that phenomenon that governments which are finding themselves at receiving ends and not able to control public opinion and public mobilization on social media, they now have learned and put crosses in place.

And what is crucial here, what is crucial in Tufekci's studies, for us to understand is that partnership between the state and that corporate media is what is enabling the government to control the particular mobilizations. We will look at that a little closely.

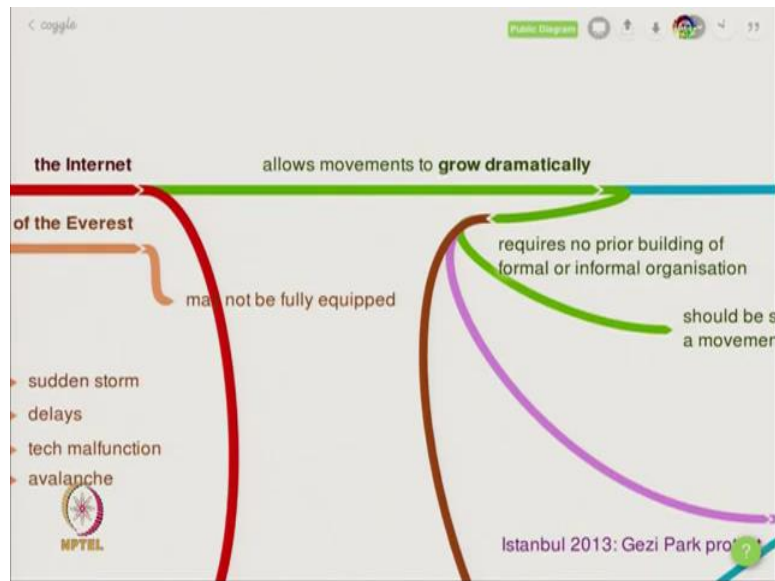
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Let us see what what the Tufecki has to say. She finds the term that she uses for these kind of protest are network protest, protest which formulate through the social media. And she finds a relationship between network protest and the role of sherpas to mountaineers. She says that when people climb, there are mountaineers who climb the Everest, or other mountains, there are sherpas who have a certain experience, who actually boost the performance of the mountaineers. They carry extra oxygen, they carry various additional food and other items with them till almost the base camp or even beyond that in certain cases and that gives a certain boost to the mountaineers. But, and it would seem that though actually that is the mountaineers who actually conquered the Everest but they would not have been able to do it had this support not been there, but in a case where there is there are certain unforeseen situations if there is a technical malfunctioning or if there is a sudden storm or if there is an avalanche there is very little that the sherpas can do.

So and it would seem that mountaineers who cannot handle things on their own have, with the help of sherpas, chewed more than they can they can bite, or bitten more than they can chew and so when it comes to a crisis, they are no longer able to handle it.

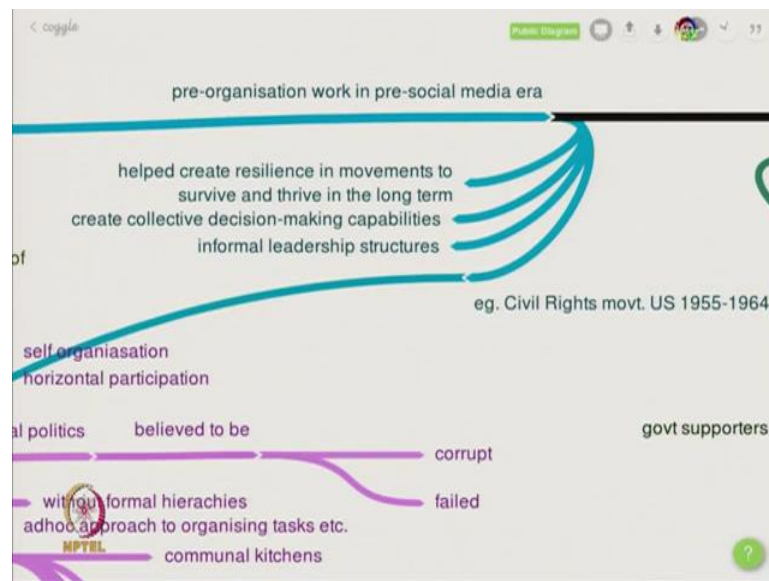
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And she suggests that similar is the case of network protest where the internet gives a certain boost allows the movements to grow them dramatically. So she links organizations to the sherpas, so whereas some mountaineers may not be fully equipped to actually or may not have a complete knowledge to be able to, or ability to conquer the range themselves, they get a boost from the presence of the sherpas. But when the crisis comes they are not able to manage it.

Similarly in the case of network protests, the internet and its interconnected character really makes the role of organization minimal at the time of the build-up, even if there is no prior organization or build up the the movements can grow dramatically and what Tufekci says really is that this is something that should be seen as an initiation of a movement and not the outcome, that is the right way to see it.

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She suggests that the rule of the of the organization is crucial because she studies some of the crucial social movements before the social media, for example, the Civil Rights Movement in US in the 1950s and 60s. She says that what happened was that in this movement the build-up is slow, people have to go campaign house-to-house, street to street and build relationship build their activists in every corner. So once this organization really builds, up once organization really develops, after that edifice it is difficult to crush. It is very difficult because you can close, shut down a printing press or you can shut down a website, but what you cannot shut down is immediately all the members of a certain organization who continue to work, possibly to revive the organization if it has been under attack in certain cases and then new leaderships that grow up, so the organization is one that that really helps create the resilience in movements to survive and thrive in the long term and they also create these. But what is important is to create certain organizational structures which allow a certain collective decision making and they may be formal or informal leadership structures.

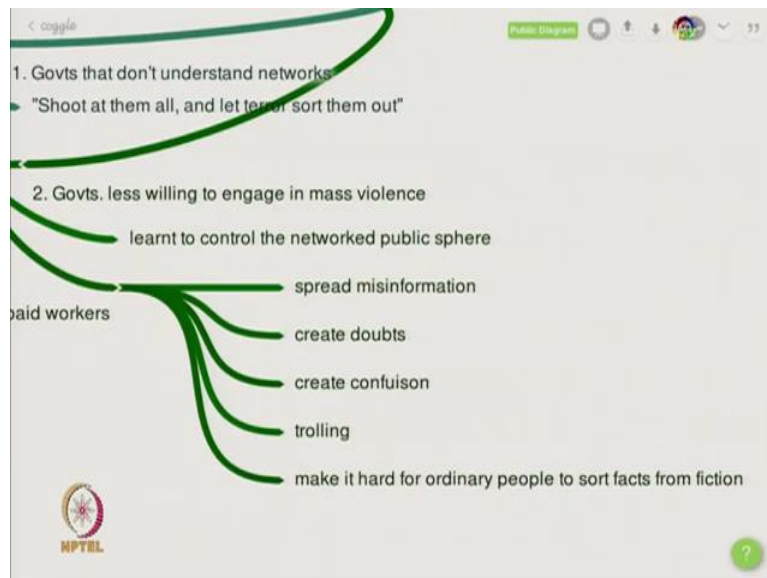
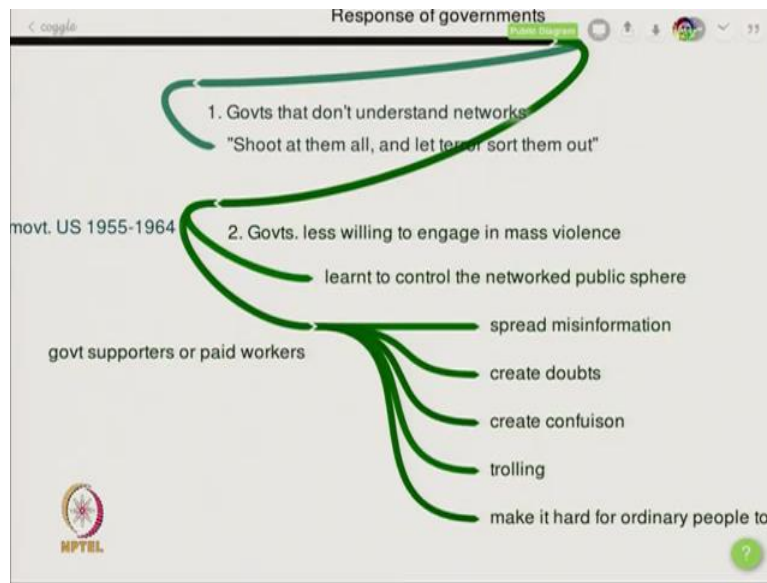
Now one of the arguments that some people do make about these network protests is that they are non-hegemonic, that you know, the organization has a certain hierarchy, it is top-down and or whichever way it can be regimented and and therefore the network protests are better because there is no hegemony, everybody is equal. But what is important here is that you need to, in the case of a movement from time to time, you have to decide upon things and in such situations a kind of a collective decision-making. Certainly in the era before the internet was not possible in the middle of a movement to take a decision on the basis of the

information from all our opinion from all participants that are not there, so the leadership decides.

Whenever the review happens, periodically the organization reviews it itself. One can argue, when in the era of the internet it is possible to hold snap polls, but we do understand that in a country continuous referendum can be dangerous because methods of authentication of this kind of online polling are extremely questionable and they are open to fraud and therefore, one needs to study the possibility of existing in a world of constant referendum. I don't think it is it is beyond question.



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Now, when these large movements came about, she says that there are two kinds of responses from the governments. One was the government which did not understand networks, did not know how to handle these networks. This was the early response to the social media mobilization phenomena, is that shoot at them and let the terror sort them out.

So when the Gazi Path Protests, when this protests in Tehrir Square happened in Egypt, one of the things that the Mubarak regime did was to let out a hord of camels on the street. A lot of people were injured and few died in the in the stampede and it created that kind of terror. So this was the government that did not understand the networks, but the second, and that is the later most studied response governments, which were prepared to handle this, were

responses from governments, A, what the Tufekci says, less willing to engage in violence, or governments which have learnt the process that have learned how to control the networked public sphere.

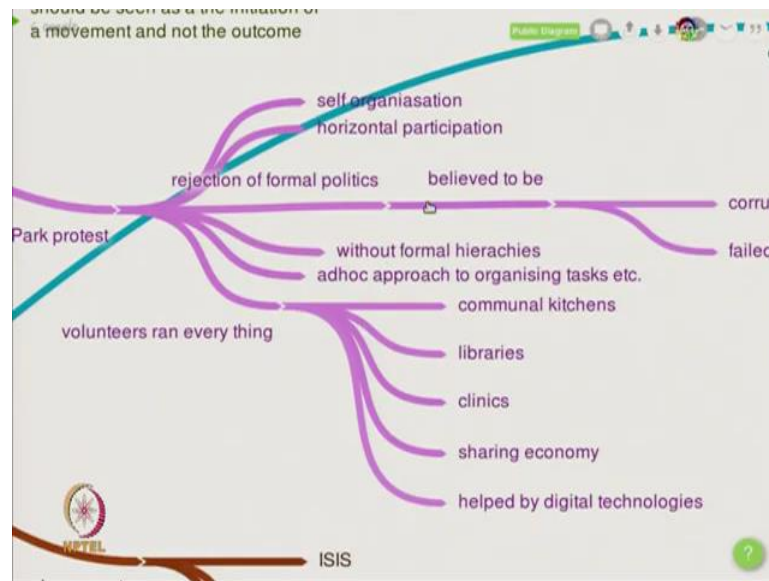
So these government's supporters either were belonging to the ruling group of coalition or government employees who would, one, monitor the internet monitor the social media keep tracking various people and groups and the online conversation, but more importantly to mediate to sort of intervene in social media conversation to actually dominate social media conversations through their particular efforts.

And what they would do is to put certain misinformation, create doubts among the people, create confusion by trolling, trolling is a certain behavior through which one sort of attacks verbally someone else whom you disagree with and make it hard for ordinary people to figure out what is right and what is wrong and a lot of fake news goes into this.

And we have seen that many governments across the world actually have this kind of a setup. It maybe the government or it could be the political organization, which is in power which could be running this kind of force and these are phenomenal forces which have the best technologies at their disposal and certainly they also have what is called in real life not only a virtual network, but also a real life network.

So when the two things come together, they magnify and they become even more even stronger and they really dominate the entire networked public sphere and it would seem to an ordinary citizen who is engaged in social media that is the only opinion that the opinion supporting the government is the only opinion and that reduces the threat of mobilization through the social media.

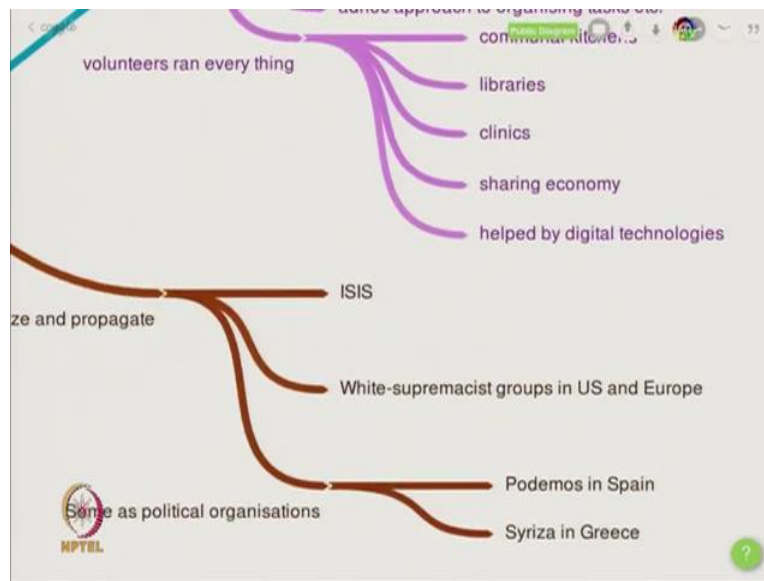
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So Tufekci looks at the specific instances of this kind of protest and the Gazi Park Protests from Istanbul in 2013 is an important example that she looks at, and it would seem that this was something that was self organized and it was a horizontal participation. There is a rejection of formal politics because political parties are corrupt, leaders are all corrupt, they are failed.

So the people have taken over. It seemed that it is all democratic and the way without formal hierarchies, or there was a certain ad hoc approach to organizing tasks. Volunteers ran everything, communal kitchens, libraries, clinics and the sharing economy held by digital technologies because they would know where small food required, supplies would go there. Who needs a certain medicine, who has someone else, has that extra pack of that medicine, it comes with this help patients to connect with doctors, so whenever someone is hit by the police the doctors the rush right there, they could also run informal hospitals right then and there.

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So that is something that was a possibility. But once the government steps in, the picture looks different. But certainly this kind of social media force was not only used by democratic movements of protesters or rebels, they were also used by right-wing groups, the ISIS, the islamic state its use of the social media space, the internet is well known and they used the social media to recruit volunteers from across the globe, sometimes create volunteers without direct or without any direct contact with the parent organization. And and know-how and training could be provided even through through the social media, which is extremely dangerous for peace and and democracy. There would be also the case of white supremacist groups and US and Europe. They were also used by political organizations which could be democratic and radical organizations. For example, the Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. We will not talk too much about that, about these particular movements or these particular organizations, you can read up on them on your own.

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To explain the effect of the social media she looks at this particular case of the Egyptian blogger who went by the name, Hani. So he was running a very popular blog, immensely popular blog which was extremely popular and he used to criticize Hosni Mubarak, the leader of Egypt at that point of time, but then the government stepped in and arrested him and he was put behind bars for six years.

And he was running an immensely popular blogger, it was a gauge of popular public opinion, popular opinion on Mubarak. To control it, he just imprisoned the blogger because the way the blog works is that there is this one person who writes and there are people who comment on it and certain blogs get certain attraction and they become major influences but by the time he served his prison sentence and he was released in 2010, he found that there were no visitors for his blog anymore. So where is everybody, because everybody had moved to Facebook by then Facebook had taken off.

So that is the time when the social media really took over and similar is the case with the Iranian blog father, as she says, Deraskshan who also realizes that the blogs no longer work because everybody has moved to the social media and the way the social media really works and operates really is for us to understand is that social media, especially sites like Twitter, every media has its own mechanism of working.

So if I can take the case of Twitter people have to follow the particular, Twitter and Facebook work very differently from each other. On Twitter there are people who will follow others, mostly people whenever they tweet the tweets are all public anybody can see it. There is of

course the option of protecting the tweet and saying that only certain people or groups of people can see my tweet but that is not what the tradition is on Twitter, Twitter is public has a more public platform.

In fact, you can access Twitter feed through multiple apps and other mechanisms. And in this kind of situation, there are certain people who are influences, those who have more number of followers, if they tweet out certain thing, they have greater reach.

Situation one can say is similar to the newspapers with their large readership, but the newspapers would be these large structures today an activist can have very high number of followers that is a possibility, many people have become influences on Instagram for example. Instagram also by a large can work in that kind of way, you can make your profile private or you can make it public. On Twitter all you have to organize the privacy settings on on the basis of each single tweet.

Facebook also has a similar situation. Facebook also allows you to have your posts public or private, or only for friends, or friends of friends, but the the practice by large on Facebook is to actually share within certain groups or with your list of friends. Sometimes activists make their posts a public so that various followers can watch it.

So the two media work very differently. Facebook works better in forms of groups, whatsapp, on the other hand, works only in the form of groups, principally there is hardly any public communication on whatsapp. So each of these have their own structures, as I said, in the digital media each platform creates the form creates the genre and the role of these influencers is something that is important.

Till the early 2000s, the first decade of 2000, till about 2007-08 when blogs were there, governments could relate to the blogs or react to the blogs almost in the similar way as they would have reacted to print, that is to arrest, shut down the blog or arrest the person writing the blog. The number of bloggers with a great readership would have been much lesser. Whereas in social media, the same article can get, the same tweet can get retweeted and go viral. Blogs never went viral, blogs start going viral only after the coming of social media. I mean when you write a blog and then share it on social media and then that goes viral.

So this phenomenon of going viral once something goes viral, after that, to control it becomes far more difficult. So the way in which government should have controlled the print or the blog would not be the way in which the governments can control social media, but they want

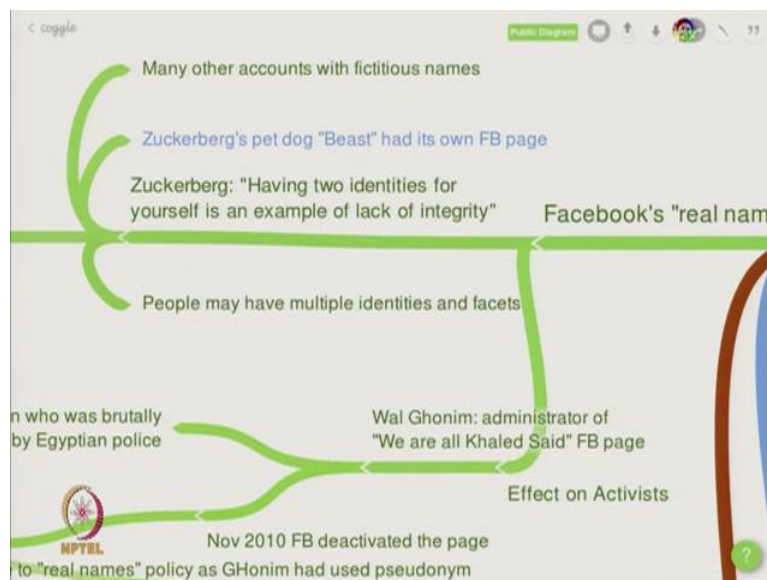
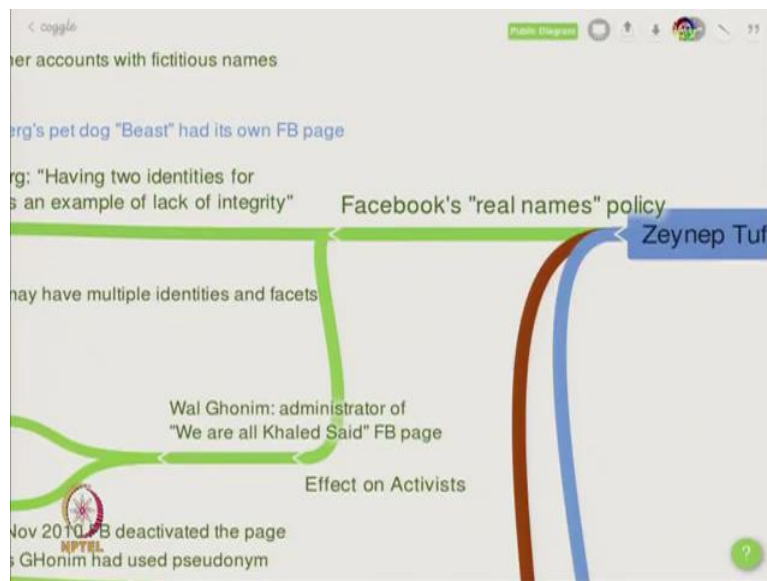
to control nevertheless. We saw one way of trying to control this to actually participate and intervene in the debate.

Whereas till the case of the electronic media or the print media, governments would have intelligence cells who would sit and monitor the electronic media, the various governments would have complete departments who would watch various channels across the world various channels that are being transmitted and note exactly what is being transmitted.

We also looked at how the colonial government maintained a detailed register and their remarks columns to say what is being read and if they find something happening which is dangerous or potentially dangerous they could step in arrest the person or take necessary action, shut down the press, ban the book and manage to take care of it, but that does not work because in the case of the previous media you had someone who created the content and others who read it, but now with with the social media you have everybody adding to the content and that becomes much more difficult.

So one of the things that the governments do is to also participate in the same same debate and try to dominate it and try to channelize that to a pro-government sentiment. So that is one thing.

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But there are certain other things that also happen and this time it happens with collaboration with the corporate media. The attempt to dominate the conversation is something that is nearly something that is outside of, you do not have to link up with the media platform to be able to participate or intervene in the debate but governments also have access to the media platforms themselves.

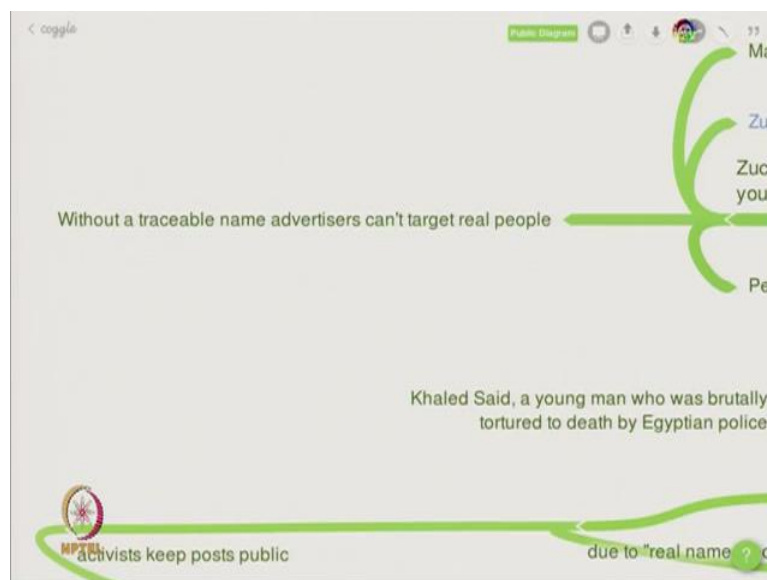
So for a moment she, Zeynep Tufeky looks closely at some of the policies of these social media platforms, specifically case of Facebook. Since Facebook has this real names policy. Now what is this real names policy that you cannot have have a Facebook account with a fictitious name, you have to have your own name, but people may for various reasons have



more than one account or not want to reveal their name this is particularly the case of LGBT people who do not want to reveal their identities but yet they want to maintain a certain political stance, activists and others.

They may have various spaces or it could be as innocent like I could want one profile for work-related activities, another profile for my friends but Mark Zuckerberg said having two identities for yourself is an example of lack of integrity, takes a very high moral position. Zeynep Tufecki debunks that statement. In fact, she points out that Zuckerberg's pet dog has his own Facebook page. Now is that a real person, sometimes Facebook would say show us an I-card that is your name and we will let you have your account, otherwise the account gets locked.

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And so but Tufecky says that there is a certain motive, there's a commercial motive behind this real names policy. It is that without a traceable name, ads cannot be targeted at real people. So if I have two accounts one for my personal use and one for the official use, that may work for me to handle my work-life balance, but it does not work for the advertiser because whether I am in my official role, whether I am in my personal role, I am still the same buyer, I will take the decision on whether to buy the next phone or not whether to buy the next car or not or whether to buy the next vegetable or not.

So the advertisers try to gather complete information about me. And this is not nearly in terms of commercial advertisement, it has also got to do with political advertisement with the

Cambridge Analytica Controversy, if you do not know about it, please go read up on Facebook and the Cambridge Analytica Phenomena.

Political ads are targeted at people, and what these social media platforms do, we talked about Google what Google can do is through your search operations through the sites that you visit, profile you and they can have very detailed information about a person's psychological orientation, their political ideological positions, their relationships, whether they are cheating their partners, their health condition. Google certainly has that information and if you have location finder on your phone on a certain social media app on even that platform also can possibly trace that and it gives you the facility of the location but it can trace how fast you're walking, or how much you walking per day.

I get an information from Google every month, saying that I have spent 60 hours in a vehicle and I have walked 4 kilometers. Now if this information, because this video is public and people may know if this information goes out to an insurance company that they might shut down my insurance thinking that you are not exercising enough. How does Google know because I do not carry my phone always with me.

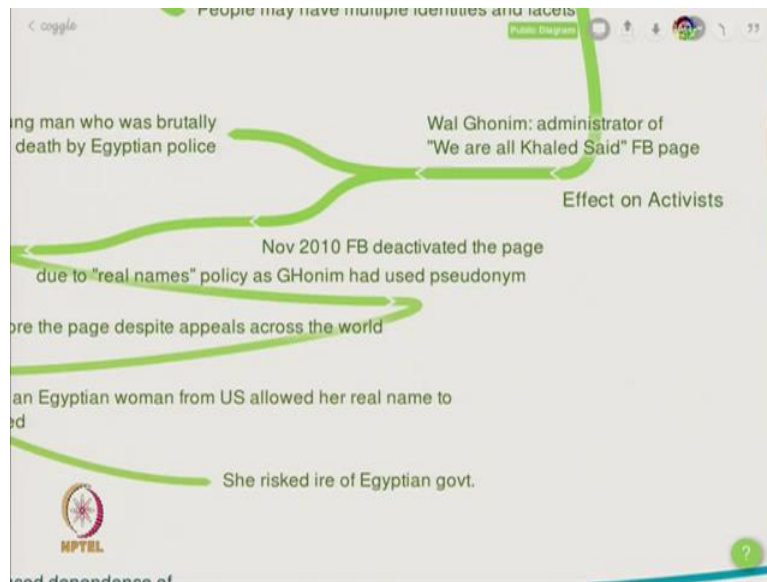
Google thinks that I am not walking but I don't carry my phone all the time. I do not because the phones actually emit harmful waves. So it is not advisable that you always carry it with you. So right now when I am lecturing the phone is not with me, it is lying somewhere there, and so even if I am moving around within, if I am walking if I am running if I am swimming Google thinks I am standing here staying at one place. It does not have the correct information about me, but it thinks it does and this information if it gets passed on to third parties, and certainly advertisers use this information as I said, advertisers target specific groups.

I am a company which sells exercise equipment, so I want to target those people who hardly does exercise, okay, and let us say Facebook or Google knows who are the ones who are stationary most of the time, let us target them and work at them. And there are enough stories worldwide to say how political advertisers actually target people's own prejudices to switch their votes to switch their ideas.

So there is a link between commerce and politics and that is a link that we have tried to hold together through this course, and how various media perform within this certain linkage

between the state and the market. And this is something that Zeynep Tufeky's study also points out.

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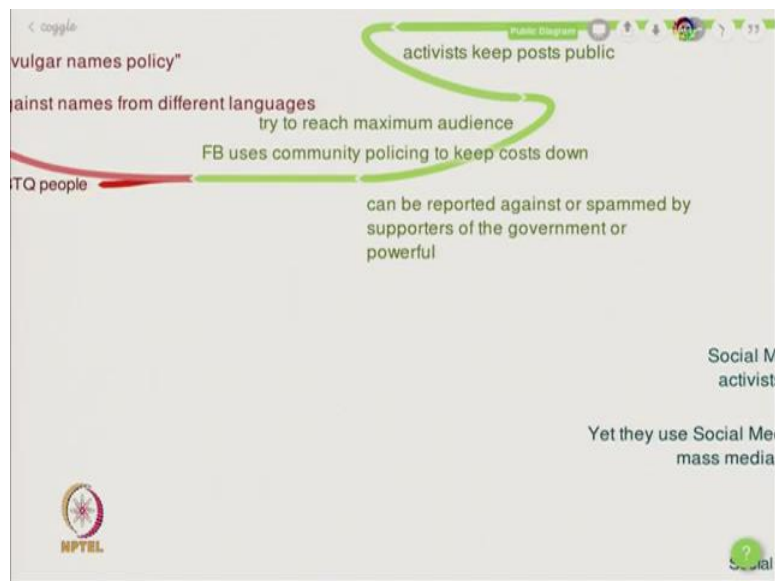
She looks at a particular example and the implication of the real names policy, it says that there was a person Ghonim who was the administrator of an important Facebook page which was We Are All Khaled Said. Who was Khaled Said, Khaled Said was a young man who was brutally tortured by the Egyptian police and again we have seen how the Egyptian leaders have moved from the blogosphere to to the social media and they all become members of this Facebook page We are all Khaled Said and that has a great effect. That becomes a big important discussion group for the various anti Anti-Mubarak people and becomes dangerous for the government. So the government contacts Facebook and Facebook shuts down, deactivates the page because they say that Ghonim was using a pseudonym, there is a real user names policy and Ghonim was using a pseudonym and it is shut down. There are of course many other people who would be using pseudonym but Ghonim was targeted in shutdown clearly as in a sense that it was some kind of a understanding between the government and Facebook. In fact, just to point out if you look at some of these organizations they actually release transparency reports. You can look up the latest Google transparency report, it will tell you how often certain government, certain countries demand personal information on certain users from these companies and how many times they are disclosing and they do not say anything more than that. But by the incidence of certain countries, which tell you which are the countries which are monitoring Facebook or other social media, you know Google a whole lot more.

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So a lot of people appealed and said please restore the page and the page was not restored. Finally an Egyptian woman from US allowed her real name to be used to reactivate that page and she did it at great risk because her family back in Egypt would have been traced. Certainly when she came back she would have been at risk, so that becomes a major question mark but what this incident shows is that the close nexus between the government and between authoritarian governments and Facebook or these social media platforms are there. And because of the end user license, you do not really remain owner of your own content.

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Activists tend to keep posts public, they try to reach the maximum audiences. Facebook does not have a dedicated team of its own they use community policing to keep costs down. So the way they work is if there is a certain post which is sensitive, if there is nudity there is obscenities in the post, they could remove it but that is done on request. So users will have to police. Unlike in print, where they would be at a bunch of editors who would sit and read through books, manuscripts and newspaper articles and various things, suggest changes and monitor for themselves.

Of course, there would be other sensors who would be looking at things but the way Facebook operates is with user bases more than a billion, it is very difficult to actually monitor what everybody is doing. The activity is huge. So most of these platforms be it youtube be it Facebook or Twitter or whatever they use community policing to keep costs down people have to report.

Now this this becomes a tool in the hands of those who ideologically disagree with activists or others. They can motivated report against these kind of posts, and the hardest hit, she says, are the queer people, the LGBTQ group, and sometimes you know Facebook's no vulgar names policy can be biased against names from different languages, people can have a certain name which can mean something else in other languages.

And in most of these cases, these are at the back end operated by bots or machine learning algorithms and these algorithms are machines, they do not have their own intelligence the intelligence that gets into any of these artificial intelligence machines, learning algorithms,

are the assumptions, the priorities, the political and cultural inclinations of the people who have written that program and then that has a multiplier effect.

So what we saw in the case of electronic media, is that or in the case of other forms of media is that certain publishing houses or certain groups or certain studios certain television channels have a greater say have a greater reach across the world, a particularly movie studios from Hollywood have a greater influence on world or so called cinema than every other place.

So similarly here the most of these companies are based out of the United States and certain cultural biases that could be there in the programming could also percolate down. I am not saying that all programmers carry that cultural bias, these companies are very large and they have offices elsewhere across the world, but still one would say that the dominant biases, that the biases of the dominant groups keeps getting replicated within these algorithms within the design of the algorithms.

So the point that I am trying to make is that whereas you know in print or in electronic medium to look at the biases of the filmmaker, of the script or the proof reader, the writer, author, poet, here we do not look at the biases only of the person who is making a certain post. You also have to go into the code because in the digital media, what is running at the back end is the code, the html, if you remember those lectures. So the writing of the code determines how the text behaves.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Zeynep Tufekci, Twitter, Facebook, whatsapp, privacy, movements, print, mobilization, print, internet, censorship, trolls, fake news, propaganda, bolg, viral, social media, monitoring, targeted advertisements