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EMERGING MEDIA, INSTABILITY AND DEMOCRACY: EXAMINING THE GRANGER-CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS OF 122 COUNTRIES FROM 1946 TO 2014

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Research has been divided on whether internet diffusion tends to facilitate democratic transition or weaken participation in a democratic society. Studies have evidenced variously that heavy internet users become less likely to take part in Democratic processes (e.g., Bailard, 2012), that the internet enhances democratic engagement (e.g., Rhue & Sundjaran, 2014) or that only particular types of internet activity lead individuals to desire and act toward democracy (e.g., Stoycheff, Nisbet & Epstein, 2016). One complicating factor in much research has been the speed and recency of the internet's development, leading some studies (e.g., Groshek, 2010) to use data from a time period when many key online resources of web 2.0, and widespread mobile access to the internet had not yet been developed (Joyce, 2011).

This study approaches these questions and makes an important contribution to update key findings in the field by extending Groshek's (2011) earlier work from 2003 through 2014. His work was based on Ball-Rocheach and Defleur's (1976) Media Systems Dependency (MSD) theory, which states that the more functions media serves in society or the greater the instability in a society, the more society will depend on media to fulfill those functions. Accordingly, Groshek (2011) divided countries into both high and low media and high and low conflict categories, and found that in high, but not low, media and conflict countries, media seemed to augment democracy.

However, because data regarding more interactive forms of mobile online media were not yet available, and insofar as the internet itself has dramatically transformed over the last decade, Groshek's earlier study was limited to studying relatively 'older' forms of media and the results reported may carry over to newer forms of media technology. The

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study reported here thus crucially updates an investigation into the potential role that emerging media plays in democratization processes.

To address these issues and incorporate important geopolitical events such as the Arab Spring, the following hypotheses, adopted as directly as possible from Groshek (2011), are advanced:

H1: In countries where emerging media serve more information functions, its diffusion will Granger-cause institutionalized democratic growth.

H2: In countries with greater sociopolitical instability due to conflict and change, emerging media diffusion will Granger-cause institutionalized democratic growth.

Method

Where possible, data was drawn from the same sources used by Groshek (2011) so as to accurately replicate the study. All of the 122 countries used in that study and all procedures, except collection and measurement of media diffusion information, were carried out similarly to Groshek (2011), making use of only those variables which Groshek (2011) identified as meaningful. Accordingly, several variables identified in the model of democratic development established by Weaver et al. (1985) were used: democracy, sociopolitical instability. All data was evaluated at the annual level, and data was drawn from, at the earliest, 1946 through 2014.

As with Groshek (2011) data was evaluated using Granger-causality tests. Granger-causality tests mathematically evaluate whether one variable helps to predict another. To demonstrate that hypothesized causes (media) and effects (democracy) are not independent, all other variables were tested reciprocally against each other, setting each variable as dependent and testing the hypothesis that any arrangement of other variables causes any variable.

Results and Conclusion

In contrast with earlier findings regarding newspaper, radio and television diffusion in Groshek (2011), Granger-causality testing identified no significant causal relationship connecting either mobile or internet diffusion to national level Democratizing effects. As such, in contrast to the expectations of MSD Theory, both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were found to be invalid.

In contrast to what Groshek (2011) observed in regards to traditional media, there seems to be no direct relationship between Democratization and media diffusion in either high or low media diffusion countries or high or low sociopolitical instability countries. This finding is important, as it suggests that new media has fundamentally distinct characteristics which cannot be predicted from studies on older of media diffusion. Furthermore, it adds strong quantitative evidence to support the notion that

the mere presence of the internet or mobile technology does not suffice to enhance national level Democratizing effects. Notably, this does not mean that particular uses or types of online activity have do not have democratizing effects.

This study is one of the first to take up the call of Stanyer and Mihelj (2016) and not only take time more seriously in communication research, but to contribute an essential update to a vital and still-ongoing field of debate.

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