Web 2.0 and Agency in International Relations

Written by Amy Rose Townsend

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To What Extent Has Web 2.0 Changed Our Understanding of Agency in International Relations?

Introduction

Web 2.0, or the so called 'read-write web',[1] has become somewhat of a buzz word in recent years. It has changed the way people were able to use the internet; it is no longer a passive instrument simply imparting information but has become a new means of communication, revolutionising the social interactions of individuals around the world. The way Web 2.0 works is perhaps most amply illustrated by a site such as Facebook, which was opened to the world in September 2006. The site now has more than 850 million active monthly users and one fifth of all web page views are Facebook pages.[2] In its most simple form, Web 2.0 represents a fundamental shift in the way in which people communicate and share information, facilitated by technological advances on the internet.[3] Web 2.0 has led to the potential for endless domestic and cross border collaboration and connection, the effects of which are already beginning to play out on a world stage.

This dissertation argues that Web 2.0 has changed our understanding of agency in two main ways: first it has allowed agency to be found at the individual level, whereas previously it was found at the level of the state or with elites among society, depending which theory is considered; Second, this individual agency can be somewhat autonomous due to exposure and access to information from outside its surrounding structure, allowing it in turn to challenge the power of structures in which they operate. These two points have implications for the International Relations discipline (IR) as this individual agency has discredited traditional theories of IR and highlighted the need for theories which address the structure/agency debate within the study of IR. This dissertation concerns both substantive international relations, that is, day to day interaction on the world stage, and the theoretical discipline of IR. In essence, it will be demonstrated that this individual agency is being practiced on a world stage, facilitated by Web 2.0 and this leads us to question both our understanding of agency and the applicability of state centric theories when studying world politics.

Statement of the Problem

It is vital that the effect of Web 2.0 on IR is studied because, as Lukes states, 'in boosting human actions into the digital domain, new modes of identity and community, territory and sovereignty, culture and society are emerging.'[4] This dissertation aims to explore the effect this is having on international relations through the lens of agency. As the term 'Web 2.0' was only coined in 2004,[5] conceptually Web 2.0 is under-examined within the broader context of IR. Carpenter and Drezner explain that Web 2.0 itself is transforming the discipline of IR; highlighting the need for it to be studied.[6] It has been argued that the agency and structure debate is 'one of the most fundamental problems in the study of social phenomena.'[7] To that end that it is imperative that anything with the potential to affect the debate is explored.

Literature Review

Some key pieces of literature which underpin the main arguments of this dissertation will now be discussed. Web 2.0 will be addressed first before the structure/agency debate is explored.

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The basis of Web 2.0 is user created content (UCC) which can be thought of as containing three main tenets '*i)* content made publicly available over the Internet, *ii)* which reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and *iii)* which is created outside of professional routines and practices.'[8] This last point is essentia as it is the fact that information is spread and created outside official channels (read structure) that means it hands power to individual and challenges structure. Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent explore both the causes and economic and social impacts of this UCC as part of the 'interactive web.'[9] Their book gives a critical account of Web 2.0 through exploring UCC and will be invaluable material during this dissertation in demonstrating how individuals can use Web 2.0 to practice agency. Ghonim applies his knowledge and experience of Web 2.0 to his book 'Revolution 2.0' in which he details his individual role in spreading information and bringing ordinary citizens together to challenge the dominant autocratic structure of the state of Egypt.[10] He describes how this mass movement was facilitated by Web 2.0 and connected to others movements in the Middle East North Africa region. [11] This book, and indeed other accounts of how Web 2.0 has been employed to challenge structure, will be vital in analysing substantive case studies in Chapter Three and demonstrating the power of Web 2.0 in practice, not just its potential.

In order to demonstrate how Web 2.0 differs from previous forms of communication and allows individuals to have agency, these previous mechanisms for spreading information must be examined. Fang details six 'communication revolutions' which stretch from the invention of an alphabet and written communication to the internet.[12] These revolutions will be essential in demonstrating how Web 2.0 differs from these previous forms of communication in the second Chapter of this dissertation. The mass media will be particularly significant to examine as it was the last major communication revolution before the internet.[13]

As previously mentioned, the structure/agency debate underpins IR. There is, therefore, a wealth of literature debating the exact meaning of the terms and their place in relation to each other and the discipline. Freidman and Starr attempt to cover this body of literature and debate in order to shorten 'future journeys across the metatheoretical – theoretical divide.'[14] They detail the ontological and epistemological structure and agency debate. Ontology is 'concerned with the existence of and the relationship between different aspects of society, such as social actors, cultural norms and social structures'[15] while epistemology is 'concerned with possibility, nature, sources and limits of human knowledge.'[16] This comprehensive study of the debate makes it possible to chart how agency is viewed in IR and assess how Web 2.0 challenges this. Wendt also identifies where the structure and agency debate lies in IR but, unlike Freidman and Starr, uses it as a tool to undermine what he terms 'structural' (read traditional or state centric) theories of IR.[17] This article will be essential when assessing how Web 2.0 has further emphasised the importance of the structure/agency debate in IR and those theories which address it.

The literature reviewed here gives a broad understanding of the structure/agency debate and the effect of Web 2.0. This dissertation intends to build on this research and establish how the latter has affected the former in both theoretical and substantive IR.

Methodological Analysis

The research for this dissertation will rely on English language sources as English is the only language of the researcher. It could be argued that this will hamper the research because the case studies are from countries with a diverse range of spoken and written languages with which the researcher is not conversant. However it is widely believed that English is the 'language of the internet'[18] which arguably means the analysis will still be credible. The research will be conducted on secondary sources using a combination of books, journal articles, speeches, reports, media and internet sources where appropriate. It would be preferable to travel to the countries that make up the case studies and carry out primary research but this is logistically impossible.

Theoretical Framework

The meta-theoretical underpinning of this dissertation will be the structure/agency debate. The structure/agency debate is central to the social sciences. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to make informed and independent decisions about their actions and behaviour.[19] Structure conversely refers to the enduring features of society that constrain human actions.[20] There is fierce debate about whether more power lies with the structure or

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the agent. This dissertation will assert that there has been a shift in power from structure to agent facilitated by Web 2.0. The theoretical framework that defines the argument will be further explored in Chapter One.

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation will be divided into six sections, four Chapters, an introduction and conclusion. The first Chapter will outline the theoretical framework while the other three will each explore a key research question.

In Chapter One the concepts of Web 2.0, globalisation, power and structure and agency will be explored and defined for this dissertation. Chapter Two will explore whether other forms of information communication, such as the media, have affected the understanding of agency in international relations. This will establish whether any change in the understanding of agency is a cumulative process, or whether Web 2.0 has instigated a drastic change in its own right. Chapter Three will examine how Web 2.0 has affected agency on a substantive level through case studies of the popularly termed 'Arab Spring ' and 'Occupy' movements. Finally Chapter Four will outline the theoretical implications for this changing understanding of agency and demonstrate that critical theories are now essential when analysing IR.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework

This Chapter will outline the theoretical framework that will underpin the argument of this dissertation. It is important to define first the tenets of the term Web 2.0 as it represents the change in technology and attitude that is vital to understand the change in understanding of agency in IR. Globalisation will then be identified and defined as a key cause of technological diffusion and thus facilitator of Web 2.0. The structure/agency debate will be explored and defined for this dissertation. Due to the strength of both structure and agency being contingent on power, an appropriate definition of power will be sought. Last, established conceptions of agency will be briefly explored as a starting point for the argument of this dissertation. Only when original conceptions of agency are understood does the significance of the change become clear.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a collective term used to describe an advance in internet technology and changing attitude to its use. It is a relatively new phenomenon, with the term itself only being coined in 2004[21] and its effect on politics is only now becoming clear. It is important, therefore, to examine its effect on IR. Atari et al explain 'Web 2.0 is more than a set of new technologies. It represents a fundamental shift in the nature of the Internet and our relationship with it—and with each other.'[22] Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, describes the term Web 2.0 as 'jargon'.[23] He says he had always intended the internet to be 'a collaborative medium, a place where we [could] all meet and read and write.'[24] Despite this original intention, it is only relatively recently that advances in technology and changes in attitudes toward and the use of the web have allowed the creation of a 'read write' web and therefore it is appropriate to term these developments 'Web 2.0.'

Web 2.0 has heralded a revolution in communication, the extent of which is being played out on a world stage, which will be demonstrated in Chapter Three. Web 2.0 can be defined as 'the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as a platform.'[25] It allows ordinary people a platform to contribute to information flows on a large scale.[26] This is a huge step forward and differs significantly from early versions of the internet or 'Web 1.0' where web pages are static and content is controlled solely by their creator.[27] Examples of websites using Web 2.0 rather than Web 1.0 can be seen from social networking sites such as Facebook and Linkedin to user controlled online encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia.[28] Maness argues that this distinction is in many cases arbitrary but concedes that 'the Web is indeed evolving into a more interactive, multi-media driven technological space.'[29] This ability to contribute to information flows easily and on a large scale is giving individuals agency as they are able to access and produce information outside the dominant structure which in turn can be, in certain cases, be used to effect structural change.

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Keohane and Nye, writing in 2001, explain that the 'information revolution', diffusion of the internet and information globally, has ensured the importance of information, or 'soft' power, in many cases over military, or 'hard' power.[30] They argue that it has not, however, 'levelled the playing field'; the power remained with those who had the ability to produce information, primarily states and multinational corporations.[31] However in Web 2.0 'The power …is in participation, enabling users to be creators as much as consumers.'[32] So unlike previous examples of internet use in the information revolution, power to control information flows can now be found in the hands of ordinary people. This challenges traditional conceptions of power in the structure/agency debate as will be discussed further below and demonstrated throughout this dissertation.

Although this dissertation is taking a broad approach to incorporate the whole Web 2.0 movement, it is important to define social networking. Social networking is a huge aspect of Web 2.0 and typifies the user controlled nature of this new breed of websites. In addition it is a popular discussion topic in the media[33] and academia.[34]

An understanding of social networking is vital to the discussion of these Web 2.0 platforms throughout the dissertation. A social networking site definition has three main elements. First, individuals have the power to construct a public profile within a 'bounded system,' in other words; each site has its own set of rules about content and privacy.[35] This public profile is key; in a social networking site; it is the individual that has the power to present him or herself, albeit with certain constraints. Second, it allows individuals to present lists of other individuals that they connect with. Last, it allows people to explore the connections that other members make.[36] This is significant as an individual is not just presenting a profile of themselves that is static; their very profile is influenced by the people they are connected to. In other words, because a list of other individuals that a person is connected to is available, an outside party may assess not only the individual themselves but also as a sum of everyone they are connected to. Social networking is a huge part of the Web 2.0 movement that is questioning our understanding of agency in IR.

Global Internet Use

It must be considered how wide-spread internet use is on a global scale. An understanding of the prevalence of internet use around the world is vital to understanding the power of Web 2.0 to give individuals agency. The highest rate of internet use among a population is in the region of North America where 78.6% of people have regular access to the internet.[37] The lowest level of internet use can be found in the region of Africa where only 13.5% of the population have regular access to the internet.[38] The world average of population access to the internet stands at 32.7% [39] which might seem incredibly low considering the claims of this dissertation. However, as it will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, in the regions where internet access is higher, individuals are able to practice agency with Web 2.0. It can therefore be reasonably assumed that as this access to the internet continues, more individuals around the world will be able to utilise Web 2.0 to practice agency.

Globalisation

Globalisation has been responsible for the spread of technologies and changes in attitudes that are termed Web 2.0. The term globalisation and the theory of globalisation are highly contested in IR. Some argue it does not exist while others question the importance of the process.[40] It is also argued that globalisation is a historic phenomenon that has been occurring for centuries. This dissertation however aims only to identify globalisation as a causal effect of the rise of Web 2.0 and thus a change in the understanding of agency. Globalisation can be described as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.'[41] This definition of globalisation highlights the nature of information sharing which is made possible with Web 2.0. It must be understood throughout this dissertation that Web 2.0 is a culmination of information revolutions that have occurred throughout history and as a direct result of technological diffusion and globalisation, a point addressed in detail in Chapter Two.

Agency and Structure

Structure

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It is impossible to define agency without discussing structure because agency is contingent on structure. Only when structure is also defined does the importance of understanding the meaning of agency, and indeed the argument of this dissertation, become clear. The structure/agency debate is central to the social sciences. Indeed 'international political systems, like all social systems, are comprised of agents and structures.' [42] In its most simple form, structure refers to the enduring features of social systems that constrain human society. [43] A structure is more than just rules and laws, though those can be a product of it. Structures can be described as 'the sets of factors which make up the multiple environments in which agents operate, and they shape the nature of choices, by setting limits to the possible.' [44] This is key to understanding structure; it shapes the very nature of what agents decide and why, through defining what is 'possible.' However, structures can also define the very nature of 'problems which occur there, by shaping our very life-worlds.'[45] It must also be understood that there is not just one definitive structure; structures exist at every level, from the family to the international system. [46] In each case study that is explored in Chapter Three it is important not only to identify where agency lies but also the structure in which they are operating. Only then will it be clear if agents are acting in contradiction of the structure, further demonstrating the power of Web 2.0. An understanding of structure helps us to define agency and chart its shift into the hands of individuals in IR.

Agency

Agency, conversely, refers to the capacity of actors to make informed and independent decisions about their actions and behaviour. [47] The term 'actors' is used here instead of individuals to allow for the idea that agency can be found in a variety of units of analysis. For example a state can have agency and they are a collection of individuals. [48] Similarly an international organisation can possess an amount of agency and that can be a collection of states or individuals from different states. [49] However, this dissertation argues that agency can now be found at the level of the individual due to the empowering nature of Web 2.0, a conception that is currently lacking in IR. Hill refers to 'agents' as 'actors' due to the fact that the former term denotes a subordinate position [50] thus, enforcing idea that an agent is an entity that has the power, or agency, to act. There is fierce debate over whether the most power lies with the structure or the agent. However, as Cerny argues, despite the historic circumstances of human beings they always possess 'wiggle' room which allows them to have an effect, however small, on the structure around them. [51] But the important point to remember is that both agency and structure have a causal relationship. Agency, the action an actor takes, impacts on structure and the structure, that an agent exists within, impacts on agency. [52] In this dissertation it is important to distinguish the terms agent and agency. Although, it is the changing understanding of agency that is being discussed, it will be argued that it is 'agents' who transmit agency. Agents can be described as 'the entities capable of decisions and actions in any given context.' [53] Therefore, no further distinction will be made between the two terms; agency cannot be understood or exercised without agents. The understanding of the agent-structure debate is of vital importance to the discipline of IR. During this dissertation it is individuals that will be identified as agents of IR, worthy of recognition in both substantive and theoretical IR. However an actor cannot practice agency without power, a concept that needs to be explored.

Power

The meaning of power, like the structure/agency debate, is also a highly contentious issue in IR, further underlining the importance of understanding the meaning of agency. The structure/agency debate itself calls into question traditional definitions of power. Traditionally power has been conceived as being directly dictated by material capability, such as military power. [54] However, as this dissertation will demonstrate that agency can be practiced by actors other than state, who are in a position to build up material capability, an alternative definition of power must be sought. For this dissertation power will be thought of in terms of influence. Dahl explains power as the ability of an actor to influence other actors into doing certain things or not doing things they otherwise would have done. [55] When writing in the context of communications, a vital component of this study, Castells describes power as 'the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actors(s) in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interests and values.'[56] This further enforces the idea of power as influence. A definition of power as influence will help to understand where agency lies and whether the rise of Web 2.0 has changed this.

It will be suggested that individual agents are, through the tools of Web 2.0 able to have the power to influence IR.

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Foucault argues that human beings need to be the main focus when discussing power.[57] Indeed, he argues, it is humans that create and lend legitimacy to surrounding social structures.[58] They also struggle against these structures. Foucault terms these 'transversal struggles' because 'they are not limited to one country. Of course, they develop more easily and to a greater extent in certain countries, but they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government.'[59] The case studies in Chapter Three will identify how these struggles are being facilitated by Web 2.0 thus leading us to question our understanding of agency. This dissertation intends to apply this human centred power principle to the structure/agency debate showing that Web 2.0 is allowing individuals to realise this power dynamic which is directly impacting on IR.

In terms of the structure/agency debate it must be considered that there is argument over whether power, or influence, lies primarily with the structure or the agent. It can be argued that due to the all-encompassing nature of structure, an agent can never act completely independently. However, as this dissertation will demonstrate Web 2.0 is allowing individuals to access and produce information outside their immediate structure, giving them agency. This not only changes our understanding of agency but may lead to this agency being used to challenge dominant structures.

Agency in International Relations

In order to understand how Web 2.0 has changed the understanding of agency it must be considered how agency has been previously understood in IR. Traditional theories of IR, such as Realism and Liberalism, do not directly address the structure/agency debate. Instead their units of analysis are states; they are the actors that they believe to hold the power to act in the anarchic structure of the world stage.[60] Indeed neo-Liberalism and neo-Realism, developed from these original theories of IR, still hold the state to be the main unit of analysis though they accept non-state actors can play a role in IR.[61] Critical theories are a family of IR theory that can be described as those that stand 'apart from the prevailing order and asks how that order came about.'[62] They not only look beyond the state when analysing world politics but more importantly take into account the structure/agency debate directly. However Friedman and Starr argue that these theories identify political elites within states as those that hold agency.[63] This dissertation will go on to explore the idea that agency is now being found at an individual level therefore this narrow conception of agency needs to be addressed. In essence this dissertation argues that Web 2.0 has a two tier impact on IR theory: firstly it questions the limited nature of traditional theories understandings of agency by instead locating agency at a sub-state level thus highlighting the importance of critical theory; second, it questions those academics which conceive agency as being found with elites in society by locating power with the, non-elite, individual through the empowering nature of Web 2.0. These issues will be further explored in the theoretical discussion of Chapter Four and will benefit from a reflection on the case studies in Chapter three.

Conclusion

Web 2.0 has been examined as not just a change in technology but a shift in people's attitudes and the way they use the internet. Web 2.0, unlike previous conceptions of the internet puts power into the hands of the user, a vital notion in this dissertation. It is this power that allows individuals to have agency. Social networking was defined as a concept that typifies the user controlled nature of Web 2.0 and allows individuals not only to share information but directly connect and communicate with each other. Globalisation was then briefly identified and examined as a reason for the technological diffusion and facilitator of Web 2.0. Indeed without globalisation the development of Web 2.0 would not have been possible.

It was then important to address the structure/agency debate and the conception of power. Although this dissertation addresses agency, it cannot be properly defined without discussing structure as the concepts are coterminous. Structure is an all-encompassing term for official or unofficial mechanisms that constrain agent behaviour. Agency conversely, in its most basic form, is the power to act autonomously within a structure. Power is defined in this dissertation as influence, and is understood to have a human centre. This conception of power helps us to identify where agency lies in the case studies that will be examined. It will be argued that individuals, or indeed groups of individuals, are able to practise agency. It was important to define where agency has been previously found in IR, a point that will be expanded in Chapter Four. In traditional theories it is found at the state level and according to some

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academics at a sub-state level with the political elite. However before these assertions about the power of Web 2.0 are demonstrated it must be considered how individuals interacted and shared information before Web 2.0.

CHAPTER TWO

Have Other Forms of Communication Affected Our Understanding of Agency?

This Chapter will argue that Web 2.0 has instigated a revolution in the way information is shared and produced which has affected our understanding of agency in its own right and it differs significantly from other mediums of sharing information. Indeed it will be argued that previous forms of information communication, the media in particular, have in fact perpetuated dominant structures. It will first be briefly explored how different forms of mass information sharing have evolved and whether they have affected the understanding of agency, in particular the media. The concept of media will then be explored and defined for this dissertation, this is important as before the rise of the internet and then Web 2.0 the traditional mass media, print, television and radio for example, was the primary means by which people received information. It will be demonstrated how the rise of the media did indeed make information more accessible. For example in the case of the Soviet Union the media, freed from previous restrictions, was a major factor facilitating its collapse. However the media did not in fact signal a change in the understanding of agency in IR. This lack of change is as a result of the media's susceptibility to elite control. This means that rather than empowering individuals as agents it perpetuates existing structures. This will be demonstrated by examining the way the media was used in the United States of America (USA) to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and as a tool of the Russian president Vladimir Putin to secure his position of power within the government over the past thirteen years. It will then be explored and demonstrated how Web 2.0 significantly differs from the traditional mass media as users are able to contribute to information shared and presented on a mass scale, giving them agency. Different examples of Web 2.0 such as blogging, Wikipedia, Wikileaks and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter will be examined to demonstrate their power in locating agency in the hands of the individual, a concept that will be further demonstrated in the next Chapter through case studies.

Communication Revolutions

Of course the rise of Web 2.0, and before that the mass media, did not signal the first revolution in mass communication. When speaking of a revolution it is arguably tempting to think of a quick and sometimes violent change. However, revolutions can be protracted and 'more subtle, evolving over decades, even centuries.'[64] Fang describes six communication revolutions and the impacts they have had. Although his book centres on the experience of the West as a consequence of globalisation and technical diffusion these revolutions are still important to consider.[65] Despite the fact that Web 2.0 shares information, significantly from ordinary individuals, at a pace and with an ease that has not been seen before, this only becomes clear when previous mass communication methods are examined.

The first revolution begins with writing and the formation of a phonetic alphabet in around the eighth century BC. This was of course influenced by written communication in ancient Egypt. Regardless of origin, when writing was used to store knowledge it was no longer confined to the limits of human memory and became limitless.[66] This was a huge step forward. It allowed messages to be communicated over a larger distances and time and en mass as people did not have to rely on oral communication and memory. Without writing and the formation of the principle of a phonetic alphabet, Web 2.0, a space to share both visual and written information, would not be able to operate. However this information sharing was limited to the literate elite so does not affect our understanding of agency.

Fang argues that the second communication revolution was that of printing. Printing began in Europe in the fifteenth century but was a convergence of facilitating factors such as the importation of paper from China.[67] This mass printing allowed the production of information on a scale that dwarfed what hand writing was able to achieve. It also allowed information to be spread more widely. Fang explains how printing facilitated the Reformation, humanism and the end of feudalism, indeed 'printing marked the start of the modern world.' [68] Eisenstein explains that printing is somewhat of an 'unacknowledged revolution.'[69] It can be seen that printing helped to expedite the sharing of information that instigated huge societal changes. However, aswith the written alphabet, this information was limited

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to those who were literate meaning a large section of society was still excluded. It therefore does not begin to question our understanding of agency in IR.

The third information revolution was that of the mass media. Although there have been other advances this was arguably the last major advancement for mass communication before the internet and subsequently Web 2.0. The mass media developed in Western Europe and the USA and was a result of the convergence of advances in printing, the invention of television and mass circulation. The significance of the mass media is that it brought information to the masses, ordinary citizens and the elite alike. Until the invention of the internet this was the main source of news and current affairs on a domestic and international level.

The last three revolutions are less vital to this study but are worth discussing as they demonstrate the pervasive power of the media, and increasingly Web 2.0. According to Fang, The fourth revolution is the rise of entertainment which is available through a variety of mediums and, particularly in the Western world, has come to take up many hours of individuals' time. The fifth revolution is a change in communications technology and attitude toward this technology in the home. Fang describes how from the middle of the twentieth century, people have had a 'Communication Toolshed Home'. This consolidated the domestic setting as the place in which individuals receive information and entertainment from the media making them inseparable from people's daily lives. This further enforces the power of the media before the rise of the internet and Web 2.0. Finally the sixth revolution can be described as the emergence of the 'Information Highway' which is a result of the convergence of 'computer, broadcasting, satellite and visual technologies.' In addition it must be considered that with the combination of the 'Information Highway' and 'Communication Toolshed Home' and the rise of Web 2.0, individuals can not only access but also contribute to information flows with ease. All the equipment they need is located in their own homes and increasingly, through mobile phones, in their own pockets.[70]

This demonstrates that information is easily accessible. Web 2.0 can be argued to be an extension of this highway. What makes Web 2.0 significant is that users have become 'creators as much as consumers.'[71] It can be seen that there have been multiple revolutions in communications that have all brought information closer to the hand of the individual, a concept that was finally realised with the rise of the mass media. However, these revolutions that Fang describes differ significantly from Web 2.0 as information is produced by an outside agent and not the individual. However, before Web 2.0 can be heralded as changing the understanding of agency in its own right, the extent to which the 'traditional' mass media have given power to the individual must be considered.

The Media

Settling on a definition of the media for this dissertation is difficult as what constitutes the media is constantly debated and redefined, particularly in light of the rise of the term 'new media'. The 'new media' incorporates the internet, a concept that will be explored separately later in this Chapter. The term mass media has been used so far in this dissertation as it denotes the ability of the media to spread information en mass. When studying the media, Lister et al describe how it is germane to think of the 'communication media' which can be defined as 'the specialised and separate institutions and organisations in which people worked: the print media and the press, photography, advertising, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television) [and] publishing.'[72] This can be thought of as the 'traditional' in comparison to the 'new media' which will be addressed alongside Web 2.0 later in the Chapter. Grossberg et al explain that definitions of the media cannot be limited to describing the 'hardware of production, transmission and reception', instead they define media 'according to the geography or the type of social relationships they are designed to construct or used to support.'[73] They describe mass media as 'primarily used for communication from a single point to a large number of points, or from a single source to an audience that includes many people' and includes 'newspapers, magazines, books, radio, broadcast, satellite and cable television'.[74] This identification of a 'single source' highlights how the ownership of the mass media outlets is concentrated in the hands of the few. In the mass media there is also a huge separation between the sender and receiver of information; that is the audience do not directly control what they view or how it is presented to them. This definition of the mass media that helps us to contrast it with the user controlled nature of Web 2.0

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To establish the extent to which the 'traditional' mass media have given power to the individual, it is necessary to examine whether the mass media, like Web 2.0, is capable of putting agency in the hands of individual. A major example of the mass media putting agency in the hands of the individual can be found in the break-up of the Soviet Union, a monolithic and entrenched structure with media that had been heavily controlled and censored. The policy of 'Glasnost,' meaning 'openness,' allowed greater media freedom, exposed people within the Soviet Union to information that had previously been inaccessible and led in part to its collapse.[75] Although this communication of information was nothing like that which is seen today with Web 2.0, it proved that agency could be understood in terms of the individual and is an example of the mass media being harnessed for this purpose; this was clear from mass protests across the Union. It also proved that, when information was available, agents could act in direct contradiction to the structure (the Soviet Union) in which they were operating and indeed had been conditioned to operate in. However, it must be understood that this breakdown was due to the exposure of individuals to information that had been unavailable to them until that point. This information was not produced by the dominant structure of the Soviet Union; it came from the Western world. Indeed the press had been "freed" by Gorbachev and thus did not help to 'reproduce' or 'enforce' the structure by limiting the nature of what was possible. Therefore although the media was able to put power in the hands of the individual, in this instance this was a unique situation in which domestic media was 'flooded' with information produced outside of the dominant structure. To that end it must be considered whether the traditional media, in current circumstances, are able to put power in the hands of individuals and challenge our understanding of agency. The extent to which the media can be controlled and by whom is also of vital importance and must be considered.

Media Control

The control of the media, and by whom, has long been the subject of intense academic debate. At the time of writing it has been brought to the forefront of public debate as well in the form of a series of media scandals and the subsequent Leveson Enquiry into press standards.[76] The UK press have been heavily criticised for not only engaging in illegal practices but, more importantly for this dissertation, having a close relationship with the government, an institution which represents the dominant structure. Habermas calls the 'public sphere' the 'zone of discourse'[77]. To that end it should therefore be used by individuals to contest and debate the mass media. However, the media can be argued to merely enforce the structure it is operating within and not allow this debate. Chomsky describes how this control of the media is achieved through certain constraints insisted on by the elites of society but that are so 'natural' that people do not recognise them. In other words they believe the information they are getting to be fact, because the constraints are 'built into the system in such a fundamental way'. Consequently, the power of the 'elites,' governmental and corporate, is being strengthened and spread by indirect control of the media.[78] This in turn perpetuates the 'structure' of society as it is the elites who ultimately benefit from this arrangement because they are in positions of power. So although the media spread information widely, because the control of the media rests in the hands of the few and is easily influenced by elites in society, it is clear that the media does not question our understanding of agency in IR.

Case Studies of Media Control

In order to prove this concept of elite media control, case studies must be examined. Castells demonstrates this unofficial elite media control through the case studies of the USA and Russia.[79] In the case of the USA, the government used the media as a 'political propaganda' machine to justify the 'hugely controversial'[80] 2003 invasion of Iraq and sustain support for the war effort. It was subsequently proved that the media had strong ties to both the government and military and were either fed false or greatly exaggerated information about the threat levels from Iraq.[81] The USA (though this is true of most countries) combined various strategies: 'political control over public media (often the most influential); government pressure on media owners; legislation empowering government control over all forms of communications; and, if everything else fails personal intimidation of journalists.'[82] In the case of Russia, Vladimir Putin has exercised state control over the media to secure his place and power within the Russian government.[83] Despite the fact that official censorship is illegal in Russia, there are both bureaucratic and financial controls of the media, applied both directly and indirectly.[84] When he was first elected as President in 1999, Putin immediately re-instated ownership of the main television channel in the country to the state, effectively giving him direct control over it. He also imprisoned the head of the only media outlet to oppose his presidential campaign.[85]

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At the time of writing Putin is in his third presidential term, having just finished four years as Prime Minister (another prominent position within the government).[86] Putin is using the mass media to perpetuate the dominant structure and his position within it. It is clear that in the case of both Russia and the USA the media has been directly or indirectly pressured by the government to reflect the interests of the political elite and enforce the dominant structure. In the case of the USA a hugely controversial and protracted war was sold to the American public and in the case of Russia the press was dominated by Putin which has directly contributed to his continuing position in power. These make an interesting comparison as although the media in Russia are classed as 'not free' the media in the USA in classed 'free.'[87] This demonstrates that, even in countries where the press is classed as free, elites can still influence the information being presented and, as argued by Chomsky, perpetuate a structure. It can be seen that the media is susceptible to elite control and therefore does not question our understanding of agency in IR. It must be considered how the Web 2.0 differs from this easily controlled and mass media that can be used to perpetuate existing structures.

Web 2.0 as the New Media

The new media can be characterised as 'digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked and simulated.'[88] As such, Web 2.0 can arguably be classed as a part of this new media. As detailed above, it is possible for the traditional media to be heavily influenced and controlled by the state. In most cases it serves to perpetuate the existing structure as dictated by elites, who benefit from this continuing structure. Hardt and Negrie argue that, unlike the traditional media, the internet can, and will, be utilised as a forum for change. They identify the internet as a 'dead' space that will provide individual agents the opportunity to rise up and challenge the dominant structure.[89] Several examples of Web 2.0 websites will now be explored to demonstrate the power of the technology to put power in the hands of the individual and question our understanding of agency in IR.

Blogging

Another example of a Web 2.0 feature that is helping to challenge our understanding of agency by empowering the individual is the phenomenon of blogging which originated from the term 'weblog.' Blogging has been an active part of the internet since the internet was rolled out for public use in 1993. However, as with other sites before the rise of Web 2.0, blogging was limited to those who possessed the skills and time to create their own websites. Now however there are many specialist sites which provide all the tools for blogging for ordinary internet users, without the need for technical knowledge of webpage writing.[90] In its most basic form, a blog can be defined as 'a frequently updated Web site consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first.'[91] Walker Rettberg explains that blogging is seen as part of the Web 2.0 movement as 'users to share their own content and… use the Web as a platform.'[92] Blogging is reactive and active due to the speed and ease with which information can be published (a key feature of Web 2.0). This means that people can react to situations as they unfold and start debates. This is significant as it is allowing individuals to share information and contribute. However it must be considered how this gives them agency. Kahn & Kellner argue that 'bloggers have demonstrated themselves as technoactivists favouring not only democratic self-expression and networking, but also global media critique and journalistic socio-political intervention.'[93] Abdo found, for example, that in Iran blogging was used to share a political discourse outside the heavily controlled press. This blogging was particularly prominent during the civil unrest in 2009 and has been used extensively by the Green movement in Iran who are against the repressive structure, enforced by the government.[94] Despite the fact the authorities in Iran continue to try to restrict the internet, in particular Web 2.0 platforms, web use is growing and bloggers are always finding more ways to by-pass state control including plans to build their own satellite for internet reception.[95] This example, coupled with the availability of blogging as an information outlet and source, makes it a clear Web 2.0 platform to give individuals agency which challenges our understanding of the term in IR.

Wikileaks

Wikileaks is a website created in 2006, run as a non-profit organisation and is reliant on donations from supporters. It aims to 'bring important news and information to the public.'[96] The key to Wikileaks' position as a platform of Web 2.0 is that, accepts contributions from anyone. In addition it also provides complete anonymity to its contributors. This

anonymity is important as Wikileaks, as the name suggests, leaks documents which are sometimes classified. This has caused a plethora of scandals and embarrassment on a world stage as information leaked has made it into the mass media and spread virally through social networking sites. Amongst the documents leaked were those that proved that the US government ignored reports of torture being conducted by the military during the Iraq war [97] along with a host of other incidents that were kept out of the mass media.[98] Wikileaks is arguably one of the more powerful Web 2.0 platforms as it releases and publicises information which directly contravenes official structures whether it be state governments or multinational corporations. They allow anyone with access to this information to submit it and have it shared publically, while protecting their own personal safety with its commitment to anonymity. This gives individuals agency as anyone can leak information that contravenes dominant structures.

Facebook and Twitter

It is now important to examine both the Web 2.0 platforms of Facebook and Twitter as they are social networking sites that have been utilised by individuals to give them agency (something that will be demonstrated in the next chapter). These two sites are examined together as they are both a form of social networking. These sites also typify the concept of UCC as discussed by Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent as users are able to produce information and directly share it with a wide audience.[99] This differs significantly from the mass media where consumers have little input into the content they receive.

Facebook was created in 2004 as a tool with which college students in America could connect to one another, it was rolled out to the general public in 2006. The company's mission statement is 'to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.'[100] Henry argues that it is the website Facebook that it is actually 'bringing Web 2.0 to the masses' by making it so easy to use.[101] This is imperative; in order for individuals to be able to use Web 2.0 to give them agency it must be accessible. Facebook is available in seventy languages and over seventy five per cent of users are outside America, where the site was invented.[102] On Facebook individuals are able to set up personal profiles and use these to interact with not only their friends but also a host of groups (or 'pages' as they are called on the site) that represent different interests or issues. They may also create these pages themselves. This allows individuals to not only discuss and debate but also band together with like-minded users from around the world on certain issues. This in turn, coupled with the wide availability of Facebook, allows individuals to practice agency as a collective group if they wish. This use of Facebook to practice individual agency will be examined in Chapter Three.

Twitter is a 'real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news.'[103] Individuals may set up accounts and publish information publically by writing a 'tweet.' 'Tweets' are 'small bursts of information' of one hundred and forty characters or less in which individuals can express personal opinions, share news and link to other content online.[104] The key to Twitter's empowering nature is that, like Facebook, it connects users with not only their friends but like minded users globally. It also has the power to facilitate the sharing of news and debate about a particular subject or event by many individuals through 'trends'(a widely discussed issue on the site) and 'hash tags' (a deliberate way of forming debate, comment and action by using a certain phrase with a '#' that other then use too).[105] An example of Twitter facilitating individual agency can be seen in Iran where it was used to report news about what were seen as rigged elections in 2009 and mobilised people to protest together on the ground.[106]

O'Reilly and Battelle argue that both Twitter and Facebook have created a 'collective mind' in which people can debate and contest issues. They are also both real time applications, meaning people can react to situations and spread information as it happens.[107] This up to the minute access to information as in happens allows individuals to become informed and, in certain situations, take action (something that will be explored in the next chapter). This is also quicker than the mass media in spreading information and covers more topics, not just those the media deem important. What is clear on both these platforms is they, unlike the mass media, allow individuals to produce and share information outside of dominant structures thus giving them agency.

Conclusion

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This chapter has demonstrated that Web 2.0 is different from the communication and information sharing revolutions that have come before. It allows anyone with internet access to contribute and access information flows, giving agency to individuals and changing our understanding of the concept in IR. It was discussed how revolutions, from the creation of a written alphabet to the invention of the internet, have all helped to make information more accessible for the individual. The mass media was then examined due to its position as the last major information revolution before the invention of the internet. In the case of the dissolution of the Soviet Union the media put agency in the hands of the individual; however this was due to information produced outside the structure. The mass media is in fact easily controlled and manipulated by elites in society and serves to perpetuate existing structures. This can be seen in the case of both Russia and the USA.. Platforms of Web 2.0 were then examined to demonstrate their distinction from the mass media and why they lead us to question our understanding of agency in IR. Web 2.0 is part of the new media that allows users to be 'creators as much as consumers.' This individual participation is clear in Wikileaks, blogging, Facebook and Twitter. Wikileaks has used the power of information, submitted by individuals, to directly challenge structures and rhetoric, as can be seen in the example of the Iraq war. This website coupled with social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, has allowed information that has not been previously available to be spread widely. This has inspired individuals to challenge dominant structures, as will be addressed in the next chapter. Blogging is another Web 2.0 phenomenon that has given individuals the ability to practice agency. In the case of Iran it is allowing individuals to continue to practice agency and spread information both in country and to the outside world despite tight censorship. In summary, although Web 2.0 is not the first information communication revolution, its scale and ability to put power into the hands of individuals, giving them agency is unmatched. This in turn questions our understanding of agency in IR.

CHAPTER THREE

How Has Web 2.0 Affected Substantive International Relations?

Now the principle of Web 2.0 technologies giving individuals agency has been established, this needs to be demonstrated. The concept of democracy will be explored initially to demonstrate how this individual agency was used to challenge entrenched undemocratic structures. This Chapter will examine substantive case studies that demonstrate how agency, facilitated by Web 2.0, can be found in the hands of individuals which has changed our understanding of agency in IR. In each case it will be demonstrated how Web 2.0 played a key role in empowering individuals to have agency and challenge dominant structures, thus changing our understanding of agency in IR. In addition if the political structure of a country changes this inevitably changes their substantive IR. The popularly termed 'Arab Spring ' will be examined to demonstrate how Web 2.0 can put agency in the hands of the individual as these platforms were key for these uprisings.

The Middle East North Africa (MENA) region is the cradle of the so-called Arab Spring. The exact definition of the MENA region is contested. For this dissertation it will be thought of as 'the Arab states of West Asia and North Africa (all members of the Arab League) and the non-Arab states of Iran, Israel and Turkey.'[108] It has been historically characterised by autocracies, dictatorships and undemocratic political process.[109] Essentially, 'the conventional view is that both democracy and democratisation are strangers' in the MENA region.[110] Before the Arab Spring it was stated that 'Egypt and Tunisia, are… two of the most authoritarian' regimes in the MENA region.[111] It is these two states and the effects of Web 2.0 on agency during recent events that will be examined. It will be demonstrated that Web 2.0 is allowing individuals to have agency and they are using this new found power to challenge the elite and tackle undemocratic and repressive structures. Although this can be argued to be a domestic issue, as it will be demonstrated, the Arab Spring connected individuals not only in the MENA region but all around the world. The 'Occupy' movement will also be very briefly examined to demonstrate that individuals are using agency to not only challenge repressive states but also the global economic structure of capitalism.

Democracy

Democracy is a highly contested term and it is not essential to the argument of this dissertation to debate it here but merely to settle on a working definition. Democracy can be defined as 'a form of government in which, in contradistinction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule.'[112] It can similarly be described as '[an]

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institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.' [113] In these definitions the key to democracy is power being in the hands of ordinary people, this is essential to the argument of this dissertation as it will be demonstrated how Web 2.0 is allowing individuals to have power and thus agency in their request for democracy. Indeed if one is to measure the extent of democracy 'the degree of the popular political participation' is essential. [114] The quest for democracy will be used to frame the concept of Web 2.0 leading to agency being found in the hands of the individual. In addition the quest for democracy is challenging entrenched autocratic structures that attempt to limit the nature of what is possible for its people.

What is the 'Arab Spring'?

The Arab Spring is a 'catch all' term that is used to describe a series of uprisings across the MENA region that began at the end of 2010.[115] It is usual in the West to refer to these uprisings as the Arab Spring (a term that will be used throughout this dissertation) while people in the region prefer the term 'Arab Awakening.' However, the protests are not limited to just Arab states but have been observed in the Persian state of Iran. Rogan explains how these uprisings are loosely linked:

'The demonstrations are largely driven by younger citizens, using cell phones and social networking websites to circumvent state controls. There is no visible leadership in many of these essentially grass roots movements. They use the same slogans and tactics as Arab citizens in other countries, learning from the successes of revolutionary movements in other Arab countries.'[116]

The two key reasons why the Arab Spring is an effective case to examine for this argument are: First Rogan identifies the use of Web 2.0 in the form of social networking and second the lack of a clear leader, demonstrating that it was not the work of an elite but instead a coming together of ordinary individuals. Interestingly it has been claimed by some that the whole movement was sparked by leaked documents published on Wikileaks that exposed wide spread government corruption financing lavish lifestyles in countries across the region while populations themselves were suffering the effects of the global economic crisis that began in 2008.[117] The role of Wikileaks typifies the concept of Web 2.0 inspiring and facilitating individual agency.

Before individual case studies are examined, it must be considered how Web 2.0 can help to foster democracy by putting power in the hands of the individual. Hague and Loader identify seven main ways that the internet is helping to facilitate democracy. First there is 'interactivity', individuals may communicate with many others on a 'reciprocal' basis. In other words information is exchanged rather than just presented, a key concept that underlines the power of Web 2.0. [118] There is a 'global network' meaning this communication is on a global as well as domestic level and is not restricted by nation state boundaries. This means that individuals can share information about democracy thus giving them agency. [119] Democracy requires a supportive culture [120] which can be facilitated through Web 2.0 platforms as citizens can both learn about the principles of democracy, have a means to express their desire to attain them and to contact others with similar aims. This idea is further supported by the principle of 'free speech' that can be practised online, away from elite media control, as demonstrated in the previous Chapter. [121] Many scholars argue that free speech and contestation are key features for an enduring and healthy democracy to take root. [122] However there has been a culture of censorship of information practiced by many of the states in the MENA region making this almost impossible. [123] Countless examples of the state closing or absorbing dissenting information flows can be seen across the region. [124] Indeed Murphy states that many regimes saw the control of dissenting information as 'a pillar of development planning' that was achieved through 'state-owned monopolies over telecommunications and the mass media.' [125] Web 2.0 however can bypass this state control; Murphy states that 'By the 1980s, however, it was becoming clear that ICTs [information communication technologies] were developing faster than the ability of governments to control them'. [126] This is key to understanding the power of Web 2.0 to empower individuals.

Web 2.0 and Democracy

Web 2.0 also allows 'free association', albeit in a virtual sense. People can join virtual communities of common interest including those that support democracy. This, as will be demonstrated, can lead to movements of individuals

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on the ground, demonstrating their agency.[127] In some states of the MENA region, political meetings and opposition parties are prevented, so Web 2.0 provides a platform for these to form, grow and disseminate information. In addition Web 2.0 can facilitate the 'construction and dissemination of information', without official review by the dominant structure and 'challenge… professional and official perspectives,' something not possible through traditional forms of media. In addition Web 2.0 allows individuals to 'break down nation-state identity,' by questioning their undemocratic identity.[128]

Egypt and Tunisia before the Arab Spring

Before the use of Web 2.0 in the Arab Spring is examined, it is necessary to define the structures within which individuals were operating to demonstrate how they practiced agency. Both Tunisia and Egypt were clearly undemocratic and heavily entrenched autocratic structures. Tunisia is officially known as the Republic of Tunisia but despite this 'republican'[129] title it has been characterised, from the latter half of the twentieth century, by authoritarianism.[130] During the twenty four year rule of President Ben Ali of the Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR) party many façade elections were held.[131] In addition free speech, freedom of association and political opposition were systematically prevented.[132] The state of Tunisia systematically repressed its population and prevented individuals from having power within the system, outside of the privileged elite. Before the Arab Spring, Egypt was similarly autocratic. Indeed Brownlee explained that since the accession of President Hosni Mubarak to power in 1981 the only freedom that had increased was the freedom of the President to suppress the population.[133] The country had been under emergency rule for all but 5 months of Mubarak's time in office. Protesting was illegal, people could be detained indefinitely without trial, including on political grounds, and that the President had the power to make law without consulting the government.[134] In addition the press was heavily controlled to prevent the broadcast of dissenting information. It also attempted to influence citizens to support the government.[135] So it can be seen that Egypt, like Tunisia, was undemocratic and limited the power of individuals to have agency within the state structure.

Tunisia

In Tunisia protests by ordinary individuals with no clear leadership who shared information and organised themselves through Web 2.0 brought an end to an undemocratic structure. The protests that brought down the regime were sparked by the plight of a young man, Mohamed Bouazizi, who in the face of intense financial pressure and underemployment and harassment from the regime committed self-immolation.[136] The desperate actions of this one individual can be argued to be of little significance. However it was what the young man represented and how ordinary Tunisians learned of his situation that is vital to this dissertation.[137] The images and story of Bouazizi spread quickly around Tunisia through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, key Web 2.0 platforms. Schraeder and Redissi, state that 'The widespread use of cell phones and social media, most notably Facebook and Twitter, was critical to the protests' rapid spread throughout the country.'[138] The regime tried to combat this dissemination of information by employing censors to block Web 2.0 sites such as YouTube, where users could access information but also post videos which could be accessed worldwide, exposing the brutal crackdown by the government against the protests. The Tunisian regime tried to hack into Facebook to steal user information and passwords; arguably with the intention of prosecution and suspension of accounts that were being used by individuals to threaten the regime.[139] Ordinary Tunisians, however, were able to practice agency and circumvent these attempts at control by accessing 'proxy servers' which allowed them to evade the government crackdown and keep broadcasting and receiving information which empowered individuals, giving them agency and challenged the dominant structure.[140] This demonstrated that unlike traditional forms of information dissemination, like the traditional media, the regime could not easily control Web 2.0. The people were calling for an end to repression and autocracy and the right of political participation, free speech and better economic policy. They demanded these things and organised protests through the medium of Web 2.0, meaning that the Tunisian people could not only communicate with each other but also share their experience with the rest of the world, causing external pressure on the regime.[141] After twenty eight days Ben Ali had left and a mere 6 weeks later the protests ended after the last of the senior members of Ben Ali's regime resigned and were replaced by an interim government.

Egypt

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In Egypt, like Tunisia,[142] individuals using their agency facilitated by Web 2.0 brought down an entrenched autocratic structure. The protests that began in Egypt in 2011 were, by no means, the first to be organised in the country. They are examined here because of the extraordinary outcome and levels of participation by ordinary people demonstrating their individual agency, due to Web 2.0.[143] It has been argued that the uprising in Egypt which toppled Mubarak after thirty years in power was inspired by the protests in Tunisia which had in turn brought down an entrenched authoritarian structure. This inspiration was a result of information shared and connections made between individuals within the two countries, and indeed across the world, using Web 2.0 sites like Facebook for example.[144] The fact that one protest movement directly influenced another, through Web 2.0, calling for an end to this undemocratic structure further highlights the power of individuals to spread information on a world stage and inspire others in different states to realise their agency. The plight of a young man being a catalyst for change, facilitated by individuals using Web 2.0, was not only seen in Tunisia. Ghonim explains that through the Facebook page 'We are All Khaled Said', that he created in memory of a man who was beaten to death for exposing police corruption, people were able to share dissenting information and organise a succession of silent protests across the country in the summer of 2010. These silent protests showed the power of Web 2.0 to give individuals agency. However, they also helped to defuse the fear people felt for the repressive and dominant structure in which they were operating and reprisal for opposition and, it can be argued, directly paved the way for the 2011 protests.[145] This highlights the power of Web 2.0 to give people agency. Through connecting and sharing information online they were able to exert agency by translating this shared information and connections into movements on the ground. The first significant day of protests was organised, through Facebook and other Web 2.0 sites, for the 25th January 2011 and by the 11th February in the same year Mubarak, who had been in power since 1981, had resigned.[146] El-Helw, an Egyptian web specialist, describes how dissenting views were expressed over blogs and social networking sites (the power of which was discussed in Chapter Two) and the government did little to stop this before the protests started. He suggests they underestimated the generation of 'Facebook kids' and naively assumed that talk would not turn into actions.[147] When the streets across Egypt were filled with people who were sharing information about the regime's repressive actions, Mubarak tried to 'unplug' the country.[148] This is an attempt to repress dissenting information, which was done systematically previously with the mass media. Despite this attempted crackdown on internet usage, people still found ways to communicate. For example the companies of Google and Twitter allied to create the 'speak2tweet' service; people that were cut off from the internet could use a land-line to ring a number and leave a voice message which was then translated into a tweet and shared publically.[149] This was significant in two ways. First, even during the crackdown people found ways to use Web 2.0 and call for representation and second individuals around the world who had been informed of the uprisings through Web 2.0 were also inspired to help these people to continue their protests, demonstrating their agency.

It would be impossible for Tunisia and Egypt, or indeed any country, to transition straight into democracy. As Berman explains 'it [democracy] never came easily, peacefully, or in some straightforward, stage-like progression.'[150] Instead this Chapter has used the issue to frame Web 2.0 changing our understanding of agency in IR by locating it in the hands of individuals. However Puddington argues that Tunisia was the greatest beneficiary of the political change in the MENA region, moving from one of the worst performing countries in the region and 'not free', according to the Freedom in the World report, to 'partly free' and on par with countries like the Philippines.[151] Egypt has had a similarly positive outcome. As Puddington explains it is the most likely country in the region to transition to democracy. At the time of writing Egypt is enjoying the rule of a democratically elected president who is taking steps to lessen the hold of the military that were instrumental in maintaining the old regime.[152] Tunisia is also now under the rule of a democratically elected constitution and is working on building a constitution that enshrines the democratic rights of individuals.[153] Howard and Hussain explain that in the case of Egypt and Tunisia 'broadcast and print media—long associated with the mobilization phase of democratization waves—took a decided backseat to communication via social networks[an example of Web 2.0].'[154] This highlights how vital Web 2.0, used by individual agents, was in the breakup of these autocratic structures.

The Impact on Substantive International Relations

In order to establish the importance of this individual agency in IR it must be considered what impact these case studies have had on IR. The impact of the Arab Spring is difficult to address due to the movement having no defined end. Indeed protests and civil unrest is still continuing in a number of countries in the region. [155] However the

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movement so far has still had a clear impact on IR. Firstly previous supporters of these autocratic regimes have come under criticism for endorsing repressive state structures.[156] It has been claimed that many countries in the West supported these regimes due to the stability they provided in the major oil producing MENA region, giving the supporters energy security.[157] This has exposed a hypocritical foreign policy of these Western countries and dented their reputation on a world stage.[158] Another impact on IR can be seen in the continuing debate about whether to intervene in Syria to help those opposed to the autocratic government.[159] This demonstrates that the Arab Spring not only has the potential to affect the IR of the countries experiencing civil unrest but also those on the world stage who consider intervening. At the height of the Arab Spring a coalition of countries intervened in Libya to support opposition forces which resulted in the end of the Muammar Gaddafi's undemocratic government.[160] Both of these cases prove that the Arab Spring, of which individuals are the drivers, is having an impact on substantive IR. Individual countries also have to debate the policy implications that the Arab Spring has and will continue to have. In the United Kingdom (UK) for example The Middle East Conservative Council has released a document entitled 'the Arab Spring: Implications for British Policy.'[161] This documents details the circumstance of each country involved in the Arab Spring and explains how British policy should respond to it.[162] This clearly demonstrates that the Arab Spring, driven by individuals practicing agency (facilitated by Web 2.0), is having an impact on substantive IR. It is clear that although the Arab Spring is an open concept it is already beginning to affect substantive IR, thus demonstrating that individuals having agency is not just a domestic issue. This means that understanding individual agency is now vital in the study of IR.

It is clear in the case studies of Egypt and Tunisia what allowed this spread of information and the organisation of mass protests, a demonstration of individual agency, was Web 2.0. Tufekci describes how for example Facebook became a forum for dissenting views when an Arabic version of the website was set up in 2009. This in turn created an 'information cascade' that prompted individuals into collective action, demonstrating their new found agency.[163] Sixty two per cent of people in the MENA region have daily access to the internet,[164] demonstrating its potential as a powerful facilitating tool. Although it can be argued that these protests may have occurred without Web 2.0, it is easy to assert that the pace and scale would have been quite different. Web 2.0 has allowed individuals to unite against a structure, in the case of Egypt and Tunisia the state. Although social uprisings themselves are not unprecedented, the scope and speed of this is unmatched, thus supporting the importance of understanding this individual agency, facilitated by Web 2.0.

It is not just repressive state structures that individuals are using their new found agency to challenge. The 'Occupy movement' is a social and political movement that is standing against economic injustice and social inequality and is a reaction to the perceived failure to deal with the economic crisis of 2008.[165] The movement started in Madrid in May 2011[166] and has spread across the globe, with sites from New York to Cape Town and around 2777 other cities.[167] Web 2.0 has played a huge role in facilitating this global movement by allowing individuals from all round the world to share information and unite under common goals. Almost every 'Occupy' movement has its own social networking profile, usually on Facebook, where it is interacting not only with other movements but also with the general public which has put agency in the hands of individuals. The use of Web 2.0 in this movement has allowed it to become global and unite many people against the pervasive structure of capitalism. Time will tell how successful this movement will be in achieving its goals for a fairer deal for the '99%,' it is clear however from the wide media coverage and the attention paid by governments that it is helping to highlight issues. Web 2.0 has been so instrumental in this that attempts are being made to create a social network platform just for Occupy users.[168]

Conclusion

This Chapter has demonstrated that agency is being found at an individual level in substantive IR. The Arab Spring is a group of movements that have called for representation across the MENA region. The key to these movements is their link to Web 2.0 platforms which have been used by individuals to practice agency. Web 2.0 allowed individuals to circumvent state controls on dissenting information, such as those placed directly or indirectly on the mass media. In the case of both Egypt and Tunisia these protests have resulted in the breakdown of pervasive autocratic structures. Democracy here is used as a framing tool to demonstrate individuals' new found agency which has allowed them to create change from a structure in which they have no right to decide their political fate into one where they do. This new found agency has in turn impacted on substantive IR. It can be seen that even individuals acting in

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a domestic setting are connecting globally and having impacts on IR. The actions of states who have supported repressive regimes is being criticised and countries around the world are accessing the policy implications of the political changes in the region, highlighting the importance of understanding individual agency IR. The theoretical discipline of IR intends to understand the motivations of an actor in IR and predict their behaviour.[169] Given the shift in our understanding of agency because of Web 2.0, it follows that we should now examine what impact this has had or should have on IR theory.

CHAPTER FOUR

What Are the Theoretical Implications for Web 2.0's Changing Understanding of Agency?

This Chapter is intended to be a brief theoretical discussion on the implications of finding agency at the individual level as a consequence of Web 2.0. Although, as the dissertation has argued, the meaning of agency has changed at a substantive level, as Kant contends 'thoughts without content are empty; intuitions with concepts are blind.'[170] This Chapter will marry the content and intuitions of the previous Chapters with the thoughts and concepts of IR theory and demonstrate how our understanding of agency had changed in the IR discipline. It will be argued that Web 2.0 has further discredited traditional IR theories of Realism and Liberalism, and highlighted the need for the world to be viewed through a critical lens by way of critical theories. In addition it has been proved in this dissertation that agency can be found at the level of the individual, not just the elite as some academics have claimed.[171]

Before exploring how the changing nature of agency has challenged the applicability of traditional theory it must first be considered what role theory plays in the study of IR. Brown explains that to theorise something is merely the act of thinking deeply or in an abstract way about something.[172] When applying this to IR, Hollis and Smith state that theories must attempt to understand the motivations of actors in IR and predict their behaviour.[173] Therefore it can be argued that, when studying IR, a theory must take into account all actors that influence IR including individuals who are able to practice agency.

The discipline of IR is based on happenings on the substantive world stage. This is of particular importance if theory is viewed as 'constitutive'; that is it contributes to the world it is trying to explain. Not only does a discussion of who holds power in the structure/agency debate question traditional theories of IR but so does any discussion of structure and agency itself. Realism and Liberalism are both traditional IR theories stemming from the 'first debate' and the foundation of the discipline after the Second World War, although the political thoughts themselves have their roots in history. Both theories are foundationalist, meaning that they believe in 'truths' and they assert a single view of human behaviour. This foundationalist assertion serves to perpetuate existing structures by viewing them as a 'truth' in IR rather than a product of human interaction. In other words, these structures cannot be challenged. Realists believe in a state centric approach to world politics; that humans are inherently selfish and wish to gain power and survive.[174] Liberals too believe that the state is the primary frame of reference in IR although they differ from realists in that they believe humans naturally seek peace.[175] These theories are also 'explanatory' meaning they seek only to explain the world, not change it. This explanatory nature leaves little room for the structure/agency debate. The extent to which it is addressed by Liberals is that they believe the world to be anarchic, this is lacking a world government or any overarching power that controls all nations; this can be argued to be the 'structure.' Individuals react to this by banding together in states for protection, making the state the actor that transmits agency as far as traditional theories are concerned. However, it must be considered that this application of the structure and agency debate to traditional IR theory is purely retrospective and wholly intimated from the main tenets of both theories. Waltz, of the 'neo-realist' school, however directly postulated the idea that state action is constrained by the anarchic system, this shows a consideration of 'structure'. However Waltz still argues that within this structure, it is only states that have the power to act. [176] Interestingly Adler argues that it is Waltz's work in 1979 on 'structural theory of IR' that became the 'point of entry' for early constructivists (a critical theory) to formulate the agent structure debate.[177] Indeed it was Waltz's theory of international politics that began the structure/agency debate; 'whilst all [critical theorists] sharing a basic dis-satisfaction with Waltz's account of international structure, do not reject the idea of structural theorising itself.'[178]

In essence traditional theory does not directly address the structure/agency debate. In the instances where it can be

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inferred that it is addressed, it can be argued that a state is the primary actor and thus the only actor capable of having agency. Freidman and Starr explain,

'theories of international relations must endogenize, or problematize, both agency and structure, and that those theories which do not are degenerative.'[179]

This is something that traditional theories don't address. These traditional theories were seriously questioned when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989. This is of particular importance to the understanding of agency as, discussed in Chapter Two. Under 'Glasnost', people within the Soviet Union were exposed to information in the media from other individuals and this led in part to its collapse.[180] Although this communication and connection was nothing like that which is seen today with Web 2.0, the mass protests across the Union that followed and that were the catalyst for change, made it clear that agency could be understood in terms of the individual. It also demonstrated that, despite the fact the they were operating, and had been condition to operate within a structure (the Soviet Union), agents could act in direct contradiction to that structure. The traditional theories failed to predict this outcome and thus their applicability to world politics was questioned.[181]

It can be seen that traditional theory neglected the theoretical question of agency but the breakdown of the Soviet Union highlighted the importance of it and demonstrated that the power (or agency) to change and shape world politics could be found with the individual, a concept that has only gained more currency with the rise of Web 2.0.

This failure of the traditional IR theories gave rise to a new form of critical IR theories. Wendt describes critical theory as 'a family of theories that include post-modernists [also known as post-structuralists], constructivists, neo-Marxists, feminists and others. What unites them is the concern with how world politics is "socially constructed."'[182] This is important when examining the meaning of agency because structure can be argued to 'socially construct' agents and thus affect the agency, or power, that they possess. As Cox explains, critical theory 'stands apart from the prevailing order and asks how that order came about.'[183] This is imperative when looking at the meaning of agency as structure viewed as the 'order.' Unlike traditional theories which seek only to explain IR, critical theory is emancipatory, meaning it seeks to challenge dominant structure and emancipate people.

So it can be seen that long before Web 2.0 and indeed the wide spread of the internet, it was the breakdown of the Soviet Union, which the traditional theories of the discipline failed to predict, that changed the understanding of agency. Indeed it can be argued that agency was not directly addressed by theory before this point and that agency, that is the power to act, was believed to lie principally with the state. This social uprising and break down of structure by individual agents warranted theoretical enquiry and this was achieved through the rise of critical theories. This need for critical theories is further enforced with the rise of Web 2.0 and the agency this gives individuals. Individuals at a sub-state level are now able to practice agency which has an impact on world politics and substantive IR therefore theories need to address sub-state actors.

There is clearly debate in IR theory as to what should be the main unit of analysis. With traditional theories, agency is interpreted as being found at the state level. When critical theories, which have a framework to address the structure/agency debate, are considered, this debate continues. Friedman and Starr conclude that individuals' elites in society, whether they be political or economic, are the ones with agency and therefore are the main units of analysis when agency is considered. They argue that this due to the influence that elites have within states which means they have the agency to affect 'international political outcomes.' However, despite the insights on the debate that Friedman and Starr have provided with their study, this dissertation argues that agency can be found at the level of ordinary individuals as they are now able, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, to directly influence international politics and therefore they should be considered when looking at the structure/agency debate. Indeed Wight defines the structure/agency debate as addressing the question 'how does human activity shape the very social circumstances in which it takes place?'[184] As individuals have been proved in this dissertation to hold and exercise power, using Web 2.0 to shape their social structures, they are worthy of analysis as well as political elites.

This chapter has addressed the theoretical implications of Web 2.0 putting power in the hands of the individual. Traditional theory supports a state centric view of IR and does not directly address the structure/agency debate. Both

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Liberalism and Realism view the state as the primary unit of analysis. The agency that individuals are able to practice, facilitated by Web 2.0, is having implications on the world stage and demonstrates that theories of IR need to look beyond the state. Critical theories do this by appreciating the socially constructed nature of IR and thus agency. There is continued discussion within the structure/agency debate about where agency lies but this dissertation has argued that it can now be found with the individual. This is in contradiction to Friedman and Starr whose study found agency was at the level of elite and demonstrates how Web 2.0 has changed our understanding of agency in the IR discipline.

CONCLUSION

To What Extent has Web 2.0 Changed Our Understanding of Agency in International Relations?

In essence this dissertation has argued that Web 2.0 has changed our understanding of agency by locating it at the level of the individual not just with states and the elite of society. This is evidenced by actions of individuals, empowered by Web 2.0, directly affecting their surrounding structures and, in turn, wider IR. This in turn has implications for IR theory leading us to question the applicability of theories that do not directly address the structure/agency debate and to conclude that the family of critical theories are now essential in the study of international relations.

Agency in its most simple form is the power that an actor has to act within and structure. A structure conversely can be defined as the lasting constructions that restrain and guide human society. This dissertation has focused primarily on our changing nature of agency in IR but an understanding of structure is imperative due to the conterminous nature of the concepts. An actors' agency is directly contingent on their power. Power is defined in this dissertation as influence; therefore the actors which Web 2.0 allows to influence IR have been identified. Traditionally in IR, agency has been identified at the level of the state or elites within society. However due to Web 2.0 it is now being found at the level of individuals.

Web 2.0 is more than a set of new technologies; it is also a change in attitude towards how and why people use the internet. Before Web 2.0 people accessed static websites for information that was controlled by the technological elite with the funds and expertise to produce these sites. In the Web 2.0 generation however, individuals without any website building experience are able to set up their own profiles and blogs on websites and contribute to information flows on a large scale. They use these tools to great effect to produce and spread information quickly. As Web 2.0 is a global phenomenon, individuals can receive information from outside the dominant structure in which they are operating which can lead them to question it and in turn affect IR.

Web 2.0 is a relatively new phenomenon, only emerging in about 2004 as a consequence of technological advances. However, rather than being directly linked to another communication revolution, as Chapter Two established, Web 2.0 was significantly empowering to individuals so as to change our understanding of agency in its own right. It is significantly distinct from other communication revolutions as, rather than just giving people access to information, it gives the tools to produce it and share it themselves on a mass scale. That said, each of the communication revolutions, described by Fang, have brought information to the individual, each time with greater ease. The most significant of these revolutions in recent years was the rise of the mass media. The mass media could be used to give individuals agency, as was the case with the breakdown of the Soviet Union. However, in this case, this was a consequence of the media spreading information that was produced outside of the dominant structure so cannot be considered to be a true reflection of the mass media changing our understanding of agency. Instead it was explored how mass media can be easily manipulated by elites in society and instead of empowering individuals it serves to perpetuate the existing structure. A concept that was clear both in Putin's use of the Russian media and the use of the media in the USA to justify the Iraq war.

Web 2.0 allows individuals to circumvent these structural controls by accessing information that is produced outside the dominant structure and also by producing information that directly challenges the structure in which they are operating. Web 2.0 is far harder to control than the media and other forms of communication. In Iran for example as the authorities attempt to clamp down on dissenting information there are plans to install an internet satellite

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specifically for internet activists so the authorities cannot monitor it. Sites such as Wikipedia, Wikileaks and blogs all demonstrate the ease with which people can share, produce and challenge information that in turn gives individuals agency, changing our understanding of it in IR.

This argument, as with the IR discipline, is based in substantive IR. Chapter Three examined a number of case studies which demonstrated how Web 2.0 has given power to individuals and thus agency. In the case of the popularly termed Arab Spring, the concept of democracy was used to frame the argument of individuals having agency. This helped us to identify the pervasive undemocratic structures in which individuals were using Web 2.0 to demonstrate agency in the call for representation. In the case of Egypt and Tunisia this was displayed by mass protests, facilitated with Web 2.0 that led to the collapse of both regimes. This had a clear impact on these states' IR and the IR of states around the world, demonstrating how vital an understanding of this individual agency is.

On a theoretical level this change in agency has implications for the discipline of IR. Theory in IR is a way of both explaining and predicting an actor's behaviour. Therefore all actors that have agency in IR should be considered. The primary unit of analysis in traditional IR theory is the state. These theories' applicability to IR was thrown in doubt when the Soviet Union collapsed and they failed to predict this. This dissertation has argued that the rise of individual agency has highlighted the importance of the structure/agency debate and further discredited traditional theory. Instead this dissertation asserts that critical theories that address the structure/agency debate are essential when studying IR. However individuals must now be considered as a unit of analysis, not just the elites of society who have been thought to be the only ones who can practice agency.

This has been a relatively short study with a host of logistical impossibilities. A longer study of this subject would benefit from going to the countries where Web 2.0 has been used to facilitate individual agency to conduct interviews to gain a better understanding of its impact. A longer study would also benefit from taking into account more regions around the world especially where internet penetration is currently low but growing to assess whether this new found individual agency is a global phenomenon.

This study has barely scratched the surface of the Web 2.0 facilitating individual agency. There is a wealth of avenues for further research. For instance it must be considered whether Web 2.0 will cause uprisings in other regions of the world where political freedoms are limited such as Africa. It must also be considered how states will combat this flow of dissenting information, like the strict controls seen in China. Ultimately Web 2.0 represents the convergence of technological advances and is constantly evolving. It is almost impossible to predict what may be the next technological advance and how this may impact on agency and what the effect on IR might be.

In summary this dissertation has found that Web 2.0 has changed our understanding of agency in IR. It can now be found at the individual level. These individuals, using Web 2.0, wield great power to influence substantive IR. This has re-enforced the need in IR to address the question of agency. Mass demonstrations and social movements are continuing to prove that agency can be found at a sub state level and be practiced by individuals. This in turn has implications for IR. The findings of this dissertation have further discredited traditional theories of IR which use the state as the primary unit of analysis and highlight the need for critical theories which look beyond the state and address the structure/agency debate.

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Web 2.0 and Agency in International Relations

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