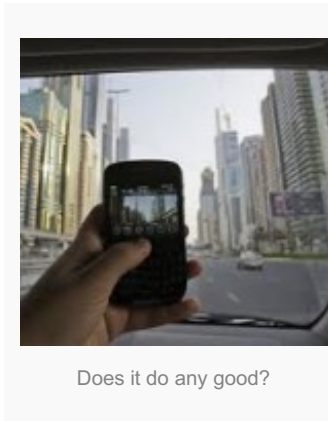


Social media: good or bad? Wellesley College talk about social media and WikiLeaks

blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/12/07/social-media-good-or-bad-wellesley-college-talk-about-social-media-and-wikileaks/

2011-12-7



What do we mean by good or bad? I think that it's good to ask moral or political questions about media but we should realise that the answers are rarely simple.*

We should always understand that we have choices about the kind of media we have – personally and as societies – there is nothing inevitable about this technology nor the uses to which it is put.

An alum of your college, Hillary Clinton knows this better than most – she is at the heart of possibly the most important debate concerning global liberty and political communications – the future of the Open Internet upon which just about all other communications will depend.

Take WikiLeaks – and I hope you do, because that is the subject of my new book, *WikiLeaks News In The Networked Era*. Is WikiLeaks an enemy in the war on terror or a liberating tool?

On the one hand it revealed things that mainstream politics and mainstream media were unable or unwilling to show us. It is a profound challenge to mainstream politics – it asks the politicians why don't you trust the citizen with more honest and transparent politics? And it is a challenge to mainstream media – it asks why are you not more critical of those in power?

When WikiLeaks worked with mainstream media organizations such as the New York Times in what I call *Networked Journalism* it produced extraordinary acts of journalism – yet it is also an irresponsible and possibly unsustainable organization – partly because of its dependence upon one unstable individual.

Now that might just be the nature of hybrid media now – transient, shifting, one moment the outsider radical platform, the next networked into mainstream news flows.

Now combine this with other media developments such as the role of social media in democratic uprisings.

Or combine those media trends with social trends such as the education of women around the world and things get even more uncertain.

This introduces uncertainty into social/political/economic structures that are already becoming unstable for other reasons such as economic forces, scientific or medical advances, climate change.

New media also introduce greater complexity into social/political/economic structures that are already becoming more complex for other reasons

This can be a good thing. Uncertainty causes instability but it may be a precondition for progressive change.

Complexity adds confusion – but it can also add diversity, choice, richness, creativity to life.

So when we look at how social media is used in political campaigns from national elections to Occupy – when we look at WikiLeaks – even when we consider Twitter – the possibilities may be positive or negative but the terms of political trade have changed.

My last thought is this – as a journalist. In an age of information abundance, uncertainty and complexity, what we need more than ever is something that can help makes sense of all this and give us a voice, including a voice against injustice. That something is ‘good’ networked journalism and it is more vital than ever.

[* These were notes of a talk given to alumni of Wellesley College in London, December 2011]

You can watch the [video](#) of my lecture about WikiLeaks delivered on November 30th at LSE [here](#)

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science