A New Method of Resistance to The Political Power: Social Media

Hülya Akkaş, Hitit University, Turkey
Onur Dursun, Hitit University, Turkey
Cansu Alaçam, Hitit University, Turkey

Abstract
Does social media have a voice of authority over the political power? Nowadays, one of the most controversial issues in modern societies is social media. Social media sites used for sharing content such as music and videos, for finding friends, for following current events, have transformed into a tool for struggling with the political power. Especially in developing countries like Turkey, people have recently been using the social media in their endeavours to resist the political power actively. Social media tools such as Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, which were first used for entertainment, games and advertisement, have now turned into political environments where discussions on politics have been formed. Social media can have a role in determining the agenda, and it is even used by political powers in some countries to assess public opinion. This study will examine whether the reactions on social media influence the decisions taken by the political power and the projects to be realized. This study will emphasize how social media discussions on the controversial actions of the political power led to a negative public opinion of the government since 1st January 2013. In sum, whether the social media has a function of controlling the political power will be examined and the influence of social media on politics will be studied.

Keywords: social media, technology, political power, resistance

Introduction

Technology has become a crucial part of people's lives and, people determine their statues in the social space by use of technology. Today technology effects human life considerably in all aspects. Technology definitely makes human life easier; nevertheless one of the popular statements made by some groups of people recently is that technology harms the traditional values. This can partly be perceived as a true statement in terms of communication technologies. Technology is conceived to make communication indirect and it almost abolished the most influential way of communication "face to face communication". Technology has turned asocial into e-social. Not only asocial individuals transformed into e-social people but also sociable people are becoming e-social.

It is not possible to forecast the future effects and prevent the negative effects of technology on individuals and the society when it appears for the first time. In order to apprehend the effects of technology on humanity, we should examine the history of technology meticulously. In this paper the impacts of communication technology, especially of internet, on individuals and the society are studied. The study dwells on social media which arose by the internet becoming so widespread and turned into a tool for social struggle against the political authority in the modern society. The efficiency of social media in controlling the political power is scrutinised. The study refers to theories of McLuhan and Castells in order to describe the power and the effects of the internet on society.

People keep up with the technological developments in their daily life. Today man has developed extensions for practically everything he used to do with his body (Mcluhan, 1962, p. 4). According to McLuhan, technological tools are adopted by people as a part of their body. Technology has made the human life and the society dependant on itself.

History of Technology

McLuhan analysed the outcomes of technology in the historical process in his work *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). Technologies like writing, alphabet, paper all have transformed the society since 3000s BC, but the breaking point was the invention of the printing press. He states that printing was the first mechanization of an ancient handicraft and led easily to the further mechanization of all handicrafts (McLuhan, 1962, p. 44). Invention of print technology is a fundamental step laying the groundwork for Enlightenment Age in Europe. Access to information was much easier after the invention of print, by virtue of books, magazines, newspapers. Society of the dark ages started to transform into the modern society.

Walter Ong examines the relation between orality and writing in his work *Orality and Literacy* (2002). He argues that writing from the beginning enhanced orality, making it possible to organize the 'principles' or constituents of oratory into a scientific 'art' (Ong, 2002, p. 9). Literacy is absolutely necessary not only for the development of science but also for history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language itself, including oral speech (Ong, 2002, p. 14). Human intellect has improved to a great degree with the introduction of writing. Invention of writing has a profound role in the process of transformation of

the human consciousness. Ong notes that; *"Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form."* (Ong, 2002, p. 77).

Ong argues that oral consciousness and literary consciousness operates differently in terms of conceptual thinking. Ong refers to Alexander Romanovich Luria's experiment in *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations* (1976) to explain the contrasts between cognitive processes among literate and illiterate persons. Luria's experiment suggests that the illiterate subjects of the study had difficulty about the questions on defining objects, articulating self-analysis, inferential reasoning, classifying objects or situations into groups, and dealing with abstract concepts. On the other hand, the literate subjects gave certain answers in compliance with their literacy levels (Ong, 2002, p. 48-54).

Knowledge and information have always been central in all historically known societies. The shift from orality to literacy brought together a wide opportunity for reproduction of the knowledge. Thanks to the invention of the fundamental technologies like the print, the flow of knowledge was much easier than before; ideas of philosophers, scientists, other intellectuals; religions, the substances of religions like Bible were disseminated in a wide area. These advancements altered the human consciousness, points of views, behaviours, all about humanity.

The invention of print by Gutenberg in 1436 can be regarded as the most substantial phenomenon preparing the base for Renaissance. The 16th century Renaissance was an age on the frontier between two thousand years of alphabetic and manuscript culture on the one hand, and the new mechanism of repeatability and quantification, on the other (McLuhan, 1962, p. 141). Thanks to the print technology knowledge was recorded and dublicated, making it much easier to access to information. This constituted one of the fundamental steps for the Age of Enlightenment.

As McLuhan cites, Alexis De Tocqueville points out the print affecting the French revolution. The printed word, achieving cultural saturation in 18th century homogenized the French nation. The typographic principles of uniformity, continuity and lineality had overlaid the complexities of ancient feudal and oral society.The Revolution was carried out by the literati (McLuhan, 1964, p. 206). In the French Revolution, print, thus proliferation of the literary works had a profound role in spreading the new ideologies about freedom, equality and transforming the society from the feudal structure to the modern society. De Tocqueville states that some of the fundamental reasons of the French Revolution, as in the cases of America and Europe are the increace in literacy and the literary man who started to deal with and get involved in politics. This process of literacy influenced all Europe in the eighteenth century towards the public movements of labor, democracy inasmuch as the human consciousness transformed thanks to literacy (De Tocqueville, 1856, p. 170-182).[1]

Habermas renders the ascent of literacy and the construction of public space in Europe in his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. He explains how literacy shapes the society and carries it to a further level. In his work Habermas states

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[1] For detail: Alexis De Tocquevıile, *Old Regime And The Revolution*, New York,Harper & Brothers Publishers, Fanklin Square, 1856, pp. 170-182

that a public sphere, similar to the one today, was build in Europe in the 17th century by the bourgeoisie. He says the basis of this public sphere was set by the literate people in the bourgeoisie, fundamentally the royal class, and conceptualizes the situation as literary public sphere. Proliferation of the materials such as print, newspapers, magazines, books, constitutes the essentials that foster the literary public. According to Habermas, thanks to bourgeoisie the literary public shifted from the royal people to the folk. French *Salons*, English coffee houses, became the critical reasoning settings of the bourgeois public sphere in which literature and art discussions were made (Habermas, 1991, p. 29). This conglomeration appears as critical reasoning in the public sphere. (Habermas, 2009, p. 96-97). Works of literature and art contributes to the process of critical reasoning. The critical reasoning in daily life spreads to areas of economics, politics, after literature and art. Psychological interests also guided the critical discussion (Rasonnement) sparked by the products of culture that had become publicly accessible: in the reading room and the theater, in museums and at concerts (Habermas, 1991, p. 29).

Habermas states that the individuals of the bourgeoisie who act in their subjective autonomy became concerned in literary actions, literature, media, and theatre. These evolutions reinforced critical reasoning in public sphere. The literary actions of bourgeoisie in their private space enhanced publications, media, literature, libraries and so on. Critical reasoning about political and other social issues, led to a political public sphere which is more overt. Bourgeoisie had a role in orginising the civil society and started to question the monarchy with the strength it takes from the private public sphere (Habermas, 2009, p. 128).

While scrutinizing the public sphere built by the bourgeoisie, Habermas put an emphasis on, reading, writing, arts, literature, publications of news, magazines, etc. As Habermas reflects in his thoughts, the public sphere is comprised of literate people, and shaped by literary actions in other words medium-writing- has a crucial role on the formation of the public sphere. In Habermas' ideas, public space is an issue related to the literal public sphere which is related to literary actions. As literary actions are based on writing, public sphere is structured by the advent of writing as a medium.

Medium Is the Message

The techno-determinist intellectual McLuhan analysed the impacts of the medium on the society thoroughly. According to McLuhan, medium has a more preeminent and influential role than the message in today's society. McLuhan states that messages, as the content, seem to transform the society; nevertheless it is the medium that makes the message cycle possible. People adapt themselves and their messages to the medium they use to convey their message. The medium used for conveying the message determines human behaviour. McLuhan as a techno-determinist intellectual appreciated the medium more than the message with his argument: "Medium is the message." (1964). The substantial point having effected McLuhan is that the medium providing the message cycle determines the way of our lives. The personal and social consequences of any medium -that is of any extension of ourselves- result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves or by any new technology. The society is constantly changing and prospering thanks to technology. McLuhan emphasises that medium has a profound role in the formation

of the society. He explains his statement by the railway illustration. He says the railway didn't introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities, new kinds of work and leisure. He asserts that it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of public association and action. He critizises the fact that, content is always perceived as more important to human beings than the shape or ways; it is only too typical that the content of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium (McLuhan, 1964, p. 203).

People always ignore the medium of the communication, ignore the process and obsessed with the result that is the message. People are not avare of the fact that the medium of any communication has undeniable effects on human. McLuhan argues that the medium influences the human body and the brain unconsciously. On the other hand, the message influences the brain consciously.[2]

Even though, medium and the message are perceived as literally distinguished concepts in communication, McLuhan states that the effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as content (McLuhan, 1964, p. 207).The content of the media is writing, the content of writing is speech. McLuhan points out the fact that the effects of the technology on the society cannot be understood without taking the medium into account.

By communication, ideas, attitudes, values, behavioural patterns, that is, culture is transformed. As the technology has advanced, so the media have improved and become more complex. The area of transforming messages is expanded thanks to the mass media. Accordingly, the contents of the messages are also modified. This situation leads us to the idea that message is not trivial but, spreading the message to large masses is of bigger importance. The message is constructed according to the medium, thus, the medium appears as the message.

At present due to the mass media, spreading messages is much easier and quicker. Thus, the dissemination of information in such short time and such easily, precipitates the globalization process. *"McLuhan examines the effects of media, beginning from the print to the television, and suggests that electronical media will turn the world into a global village by spreading the cultural elements worldwide."* (Uslu Ata, 1985, p. 24). Due to mass media, the time concept needed for transmitting the cultural values, ideas and so on, is eliminated. And this fosters globalization process.

This study is a review of the technological advances such as writing, print, and the impacts of these advancements on the society in the historical perspective referring mainly to thoughts of the intellectuals McLuhan, and Ong. The fallowing part of the study focuses on the social media which is a leading factor affecting all humanity and based on the Internet technology; the influences of social media on society; and how the public sphere is determined by the social media.

Network Society

Castells put forward the concept; *the network society* which he defines as the social structure resulting from the interaction between the new technological paradigm and

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[2] Access address: www.mala.bc.ca/soules/paradox/mcluhan.html, access date: 03.04.2013.

social organization at large (Castells, 2005, p. 3). Technology is a prerequisite for the emergence of a new form of social organization based on networking. This is due to the diffusion of networking in all realms of activity on the basis of digital communication networks (Castells, 2005, p. 3). Thanks to the networks information can be shared worldwide in a moment, and information has no boundaries. This makes the network society global as Castells says. The network society is based on networks, and communication networks transcend boundaries, it is based on global networks (Castells, 2005, p. 4).

According to Castells, network society can be defined as a social structure based on networks operated by information and communication technologies based in microelectronics and digital computer networks that generate, process, and distribute information on the basis of the knowledge accumulated in the nodes of the networks (2005, p. 7).

The network society is also associated with a transformation of sociability. Castells states that,

> What we observe is not the fading away of face to face interaction or the increasing isolation of people in front of their computers. We know, from studies in different societies, that in most cases, Internet users are more social, have more friends and contacts, and are more socially and politically active than non-users. (Castells, 2005, p. 11)

The frequency of internet use in daily life is linked to a more active social life and political attitude. Moreover, Castells describes the network society as a hypersocial society, rather than society of isolation (Castells, 2005, p. 11).

With the introduction of networks into people's life and occupying an important part of our lives, the concept of sociability has gained a different meaning. It does not only stem from the networks and the internet technologies. It is also a consequence of the change in the structure of the society and the point of view about the logic embedded in the communication networks. At this point, the phenomenon of networked individualism emerges in that social structure and historical evolution induce the emergence of individualism as the dominant culture of our societies, and the new communication technologies perfectly fit into the mode of building sociability along self-selected communication networks. Thus, the network society is a society of networked individuals (Castells, 2005, p. 12).

> However, individualism may also be a form of 'collective identity. All identities are constructed. The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. But individuals, social groups, and societies process all these materials, and rearrange their meaning, according to social determinations and cultural projects that are rooted in their social structure, and in their space/time framework. I propose, as a hypothesis, that, in general terms, who constructs collective identity, and for what, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity. (Castells, 2010b, p. 7)

A chief characteristic of the network society is the shift in the context of communication. The realms of communication have changed from interpersonal into media based communication in the network society. What transformed is not only the society, but also the nature of the media and communication.

Communication consists of some main elements which effect the transmission between the channels included, with various aspects. Castells elaborates this as follows;

> Communication constitutes the public space, i.e. the cognitive space where people's minds receive information and form their views by processing signals from society at large. While interpersonal communication is a private relationship, shaped by the actors of the interaction, media communication systems sets the relationship between the institutions and organizations of society and people at large, not as individuals, but as a collective receiver of information, even if ultimately information is processed by each individual according to her personal characteristics. This is why the structure and dynamics of socialized communication is essential in the formation of consciousness and opinion, at the source of political decision making. (Castells, 2005, p. 12)

The communication system has transformed into a mostly digital form than the former structure which was based on manuscript and it has become interactive. Owing to the new communication system, a virtual culture has arisen. In the network society, virtuality is the foundation of reality through the new forms of socialized communication (Castells, 2005, p. 14). What characterizes the culture of real virtuality is the mixing of themes, messages, images, and identities in a potentially interactive hypertext (Castells, 2010c, p. 256-257). The individual is a more active component of the new digital communicative system. With the digital communication system, as Castells notes societies have moved from a mass media system to a customized and fragmented multimedia system, where audiences are increasingly segmented. Because the system is diversified and flexible, it allows a much greater integration of all sources of communication into the same hypertext (Castells, 2005, p. 13).

Since politics is largely dependent on the public space of socialized communication, the political process is transformed under the conditions of the culture of real virtuality (Castells, 2005, p. 14). Political attitudes, are substantially affected by the constituents of communication such as the messages, the agent and the medium.

History of Social Media

Although the concept of social media, which occupies an undeniably big part of our lives today, looks like recent phenomena, its roots date back to 1969.[3]

Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3)

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[3] http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-1969-2012_b45869

view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd, Ellison, p. 2007).

As we can see from Boyd's definition, social media are Web sites, individuals and groups create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person and group conversations. According to Boyd's definition, the first recognizable social network site launched in 1997. SixDegrees.com, the first recognised social media site, allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends and, beginning in 1998, surf the Friends lists (Boyd, Ellison, p. 2007).

As the internet technology progressed and was spread to a greater area in the world, the population of people engaged in social media increased considerably. The internet has started to take up a larger part of people's lives and this led to some changes in the social structure. The lifestyles, attitudes, behaviors, ways of thinking have evolved in accordance with the internet. The introduction of *facebook.com* (2004), *youtube.com* (2005), *twitter.com* (2006) and *weblogs* have paved the way for the network society of today. Most human actions have been transported into virtual world by the social media. To illustrate, face-to-face communication has been diminished and communication environment carried into the internet. As such, social actions, protests have been organized through social media recently (Storck, 2011, p. 10-13). Social movements were transported into virtual environment from real-life settings. The entertainment aim of social media with the content such as photos, videos, games, shifted to a medium for protests. Social movements of all kind, from environmental movements to right-wing extremist ideologies (e.g. Nazism, racism) took advantage of the flexibility of the Net to voice their views, and to link up across the country and across the globe (Castells, 2001, p. 54).

Castells remarks some points about the effects of computer sciences on society.

> Networks became the most efficient organizational forms as a result of three major features of networks which benefited from the new technological environment: flexibility, scalability, and survivability. Flexibility is the ability to reconfigure according to changing environments and retain their goals while changing their components, sometimes by passing blocking points of communication channels to find new connections. Scalability is the ability to expand or shrink in size with little disruption. Survivability is the ability of networks, because they have no single center and can operate in a wide range of configurations, to withstand attacks to their nodes and codes because the codes of the network are contained in multiple nodes that can reproduce the instructions and find new ways to perform. (Castells, 2009, p. 23; 2004, p. 5-6)

Life has been transported to the virtual environment. Social struggle processes have been carried out in virtual settings recently. Some segments of the society ensure their maintenance on the internet and the major communication tool they use to organize is the "social media". As Castells argues, we are living in the network society and we are developing new methods and strategies to keep up with the new technologies.
In the network society, the structure of social movements has also mutated, arranged on the networks. The former sytle of organization for social movements which were directed from and gathered in a central space has been modified by the internet phenomenon. By using the Internet, the social movements do not need a centralized,

command structure invested with authority and decision-making power. Different groups would call on different messages, and present their views, and their conflicts, to everybody via the Net (Castells, 2010b, p. 154-155).

The social media has a big influence on the governments' actions. We can state that social media today is an effective control mechanism on the political power. This means a big change in the structure of the society, and the nature of the media. We can see the transformation in the aims of using social media from past to the present. Social media experienced a shift in aims from leisure time activity, to a public space where most people's life is influenced in various aspects. And the governments appreciate the importance of social media. As they see the social media as a threat to their authority. This is also due to the fact that there is an intensive flow of information which has an enlightening role on humanity. At present people are more aware of their rights and organizing through the social media is much easier.

Social Media and Turkey (2013-2014)

This study scrutinies the agenda set upon some decisions or implementations of the government being reflected on the social media during the process between 1 January 2013 and 1 June 2014. It also examines in what ways this agenda influenced the political power's decisions. In the past 1,5 years time, the agenda of Turkey was quite busy. The current political events had a considerable part on the agenda of social media. Five leading events, which made an overwhelming impression on social media, are examined in detail with their reasons, with their reflections on the social media, and the consequents.

(2013 May-June): The Gezi park Protests began on 29 May 2013 and lasted about a month. The protest, which began around Gezi Park (Istanbul) by a small group of people against the construction of a building in Gezi Park's place, was spread to all İstanbul in a short time. And then, social media getting engaged in the process, the protests spread all over Turkey even to some parts out of Turkey. The number of the twitter users which is 1,8 million on 29 May 2013, had risen to over 9,5 million people by 10 June 2013.[4] After a month, the Project was given up. The Project of the building in Gezi Park was prevented by the help of social media. The protests for saving the Gezi park turned into a protest stream agaits the government. After these events, blocking of social media sites entered on the agenda of the government.

(2013 May-June) The third bridge in Istanbul has been a current issue discussed on the social media especially on twitter. People were against the construction of the bridge because the trees in the area of the Project were to be cut.[5] The government didn't give up its decision though. The construction of the 3rd bridge is going on.

(2013 Nowember) Prime Minister announced in his statement: "Male and female students cannot be roommates and share the same house, the houses will be inspected,

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[4] Serdar KUZULUOĞLU, "Gezi Parkı Eylemlerinin Sosyal Medya Karnesi" (Evaluation of the Gezi Park Protests on Social media), *Radikal* Newspaper, 19.06.2013,
(http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/m_serdar_kuzuloglu/gezi_parki_eylemlerinin_sosyal_medya_karnesi-1138146)
[5] "Üçüncü köprü için ağaç katliamı" (Massacre of trees for the third bridge in İstanbul), *Gerçek Gündem*, (http://www.gercekgundem.com/galeri/istanbul/2342/ucuncu-kopru-icin-agac-katliami#).

because it is not appropriate for our conservative society structure."[6] After the Prime Minister's talk, this statement was carried into the agenda of the social media. Than the prime ministery made a new announcement: "there are not inspections to the houses, the inspections will be carrioud out only in dorms." [7] This plan was drawn back after the reactions on the social media.

(2014 January-February) The 3rd Airport construction Project got negative reaction because of the trees to be cut and got in the social media agenda. According to the news text published in *Cumhuriyet*, "*657.950 trees were going to be cut and 1.855.391 trees were going to be moved to other places.*"[8] After it was carried to the court, the court decided to stop the building of the Project but the final decisionof the government on the issue is not certain.

(2013-2014) The protests against the construction of new prime ministery building in *Atatürk Orman Çiftliği (a big park in Ankara)* began on social media. On the day the decision of the government about the construction was announced, the event became the trending topic on social media. On the same day, the relevant hashtag became the top second on twitter.[9] The construction of this project has begun. After the project was sued by the association of Forest Engineers, the court's decision about the project was to cancel the project. [10] Notwithstanding, the construction is going on.

Conclusion

The process of Gezi Park protests is a breaking point in social media in Turkey. Turkish society noticed the power of social media after these protests. The sample events given in the analyses part of the society caused some dramatic changes in Turkey. And social media played a driving force role in organizing people during the protests on these events. Eventhough some protests didn't achieve their goals, there was a change in people's consciousness. People became more sensitive about political and social issues and the policies of the government have been discussed social media.

The power of social media in Turkey formed a pressure on the political power. The government blocked some social media sites in order to control the social movements on social media. After the corruption scandal in Turkey on 17 December 2013, the

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[6] "Spor Toto ve Milli Piyango'da sürpriz hamle" (Surprise in the lottery), *Zaman* Newspaper, 04.11.2013 (http://www.zaman.com.tr/politika_spor-toto-ve-milli-piyangoda-surpriz-hamle_2161542.html).
[7] "Başbakanlık: Evlere denetim yok, talimat yurtlar için" (The inspections are only for the dorms not for the houses), Hürriyet Gazetesi, 04.11.2013, (http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/25043121.asp).
[8] "Üçüncü havalimanı için büyük katliam: İşte resmi rakamlar", (The massacre fort he third airport: the official numbers)", *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, 09 Haziran 2014, (http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/80807/Ucuncu_havalimani_icin_buyuk_katliam__iste_resmi_rakamlar.html#).
[9] "Yeni Başbakanlık binası için Atatürk Orman Çiftliği Gazi Yerleşkesi'nin seçilmesi sosyal medyada büyük tepkiye neden oldu" (The project of the residence for theprime ministery in Atatürk Orman Çiftliği raised reactions on the socialmedia), Access address: http://www.emlaktasondakika.com/t/Ataturk-Orman-Ciftligi-Gazi-Yerleskesi/Ataturk-Orman-Ciftligine-Basbakanlik-binasi-sosyal-medyayi-salladi/35244.aspx, access date: 04.07.2014).
[10] "AOÇ'de yapılan Başbakanlık binası için şok karar" (The shock decision for the prime ministery residence), *Dünya* Newspaper, 04.03.2014, (http://www.dunya.com/aocde-yapilan-basbakanlik-binasi-icin-sok-karar-221050h.htm).

tape records were spread via social media and it reduced the prestige of the government. Towards the local elections on 30 March 2014, the government blocked access to the sites twitter.com and then youtube.com. After the elections both sites were opened to access. Likewise, in some countries social media sites are totally banned in order to prevent the organizations of social movements. These prohibitions point out to the power of social media.

As the scholars McLuhan, Castells, Ong aslo states, medium has always pioneered the society throughout the history. The influence of the medium on the society, which started with the invention of writing, goes on today with the enormous effects of the internet media and other technological tools on society. The medium which conduced to abolishment of kingdoms, changed political and social structures dramatically, has never lost its power. And the fact that the political power regards the social media as a danger demonstrates this power of the medium clearly.

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