

Impact of Social Media on Global Awareness

BY JOYCE XU

The University of Hong Kong

"I am here to speak up for the right of education of every child. I want education for the sons and the daughters of all the extremists especially the Taliban..." The eloquent speech of 16-year-old Pakistani girl Malala Yousafzai at the United Nation Youth Assembly went viral on Youtube and hit millions of retweets in July 2013, touching hearts from all over the world. Her blog for BBC Urdu in 2009 also caught global attention when she recorded her dramatic life under the Taliban. Since then, Malala has been catapulted to fame. Advocating girls' right to education in the developing countries has become the focal point of world issues.

In today's globalizing world, we are increasingly bombarded with a myriad of social media tools: Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Weibo, Tumblr, Google Plus, Instagram, blogs, forums, to name but a few. Social media has indeed made a profound impact on our personal lives that enables us to be closely interconnected in a "global village". From the use of chemical weapons in Syria to the launch of iPhone 5s and 5c, from the power of Super Typhoon Usagi to the radiation crisis at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant, we can always keep abreast with up to the minute news from around the world via different kinds of social media, which undoubtedly provides us with an interactive and cosmic platform through which we can create, discuss and exchange an avalanche of information and form social networks easily in the virtual world. With the escalating popularity of social media, our global awareness has been greatly enhanced regardless of geographical boundaries.

In fact, the booming advancement of Web 2.0 technology has brought us boundless benefits. Everything we want to know can be done with just a few clicks on a screen. News in the format of text, picture, video and audio is circulated online at such a rapid pace that is beyond our imagination. We can gain access to a great deal of information and get in touch with abundant friends from various cultures and backgrounds conveniently. We can freely express our opinions and comment on others' posts. We can also become citizen journalists by using hashtags and sharing any breaking news stories with the global audience. Apart from search engines, the proliferation of various social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter has really widened our horizons on world affairs and built international understanding to a large extent.

Day after day, we are inundated with a massive amount of news from social media. You can find out how the 9/11 plane crash occurred or learn how South Africans live in dire poverty by watching the videos on Youtube anytime. When the ruthless earthquake rocked Japan in 2011, immediate status updates and graphic

photos were disseminated on Facebook and Twitter. "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate and Youtube to tell the world," the remarks from an Egyptian activist during the Arab Spring also sheds light on the tremendous power of information sharing on social media sites, which help to mobilize a raft of like-minded people together to initiate momentous social movements, toppling autocratic regimes in Arab nations like Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen.

In China, we can acquire first-hand news from micro-blogging sites especially Sina Weibo, a Twitter equivalent. In the latest fallen political star Bo Xilai case, people across the world can obtain updated news of his bribery trial from the official Weibo account of Jinan court. In recent years, unprecedented whistle-blowing movement against social injustice has been waged on China's social media network, triggering numerous environmental protests as well as exposing dozens of corrupt high-ranking government officials such as the illicit sex scandal of former Chongqing Beibei District Party Secretary Lei Zhengfu in November 2012. Recognizing the potential threats, the Chinese government has begun a nationwide crackdown against online rumor-mongering.

On top of that, thanks to social media, we get to know a wide range of economic, political, social, environmental and cultural problems affecting the globe today. We can even spread influential message to the extent of turning vision into action. On the other hand, the less underprivileged in the developing world can also make good use of social media technologies to draw attention to their imminent plights and make their voices heard on a global scale. For instance, Twestival, a worldwide charity campaign attended by more than 34 countries, is aimed at empowering the world to organize offline events and raise funds for impoverished people through social media like Twitter, raising awareness on global issues such as climate change and clean water. This brings people living in other corners of the world who are experiencing similar situations together to thrash out effective strategies. Hence, social media helps to inspire people to understand their roles and make a difference for the greater good of the community.

All in all, our world is evolving constantly in the digital age. Social media is really a revolutionary tool that alters the way we communicate and reshapes the way we look at the world. It helps to bring us closer together and feeds us with things happening around the globe. As a global citizen, we should care more about the earth we are living in and capitalize on every social media channel to get acquainted with the wider world so as to prepare for any future challenges ahead.