

Field:

Social Sciences/Humanities

Session Topic:

Social and Cultural Meaning of Networks

Speaker:

Shinya ICHINOHE, Keiwa College

1. Introduction

Information sharing through social networks enhanced social bonds of people. It supports sharing information concerning human activities from regular daily event to insurgency campaigns. Most of web services, which support such human activities, are originated from US and growing everywhere rapidly. However, in East Asia region, including China, Korea and Japan, each country has its own circumstances. For instance, in Japan, the Great East Japan Earthquake made mass media collaborate with social media and role of social media has been redefined.

2. Social Media and Its Impact

Social network services, such as Twitter or Facebook, have played an important role in political changes in Tunisia and Egypt, which can be taken as the paradigm shift in political impact of African countries, 2011. It is said that the origin of such movements originate from Moldova's "Twitter Revolution" Subsequently, protest movements in Iran and China were also supported by Social Media. Although the jury for the role of social media is split, it is certain that social media has exercised influence on involving people to actual movements. But we also studied during the UK riot that this feature is double-edged. It can be said that groups "unwanted by governments" got media "uncontrollable by government"

While analyzing social media from service providers' perspective, the most impressive service is geolocation service that , add a new context to social networks and enhance information credibility. Fairness in obtaining users' consent about geolocation tracking is one of recent main issues.

3. Social Media in Japan and East Asia

Although it is well known that Social media played important role outside Japan, it is seldom discussed on the possibility of national (revolutionary) reforms or movements by social media. The reason might include self-contained (isolated) Japanese internet space due to the language barrier and relationship between social media and mass media in Japan. Furthermore, coexistence of different races and religions doesn't become central issue of Japanese society.

Social network services from US, such as Twitter and Facebook, have not established the biggest market share in Japan yet. Mixi, a domestic SNS which started in 2004, has the

biggest share in Japan in terms of penetration rate. In South Korea, Cyworld keeps dominant position; the situation is similar to Japan. In China too, domestic providers have major share, but the reasons are somehow different from Japan or South Korea. Chinese situation looks mainly because of filtering by the Great Fire Wall(GFW). Recently, Twitter and Facebook are getting more Japanese users rapidly, it is uncertain that Mixi keeps their own dominant status or not.

In Japan, diffusion of smart phone, focusing on usage of twitter or Facebook, has been slow because most of 2G cellular phones in Japan were made to conform PDC standard and incompatible to other countries, such as GSM. Some called unique and highly functional Japanese cellular phones as "Galapagos" phones.

For these reasons, the issue concerning social media in Japan is mainly youth protection, especially for younger generation addicting SNS or network game. As a result social reforms by networks have not been discussed seriously.

4. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Networks

For Japanese people, who have used network services idyllically, the Great East Japan Earthquake was a major turning point. After the disaster, people in Tokyo and user who could access to the net, searched Twitter and sought out for information. In disaster areas, word-of-mouth information works well for many survivors too. On the other hand, word-of-mouth information included many false rumors among survivors.

After the nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Japanese government and Tokyo Electric Power adopted a guarded stance to disclose critical information, and it increased the public's distrust of mass media, which doesn't cut to the heart of problem. On the other hand, unbiased analyses about nuclear power by researchers are spotlighted. Anti-nuclear movements have been considered as the activities by extremists but it is getting supports from ordinary social media users.

The most important part of recent Japanese society is super-aging. Most of elderly persons don't benefit from social media in the disaster. Smart phone or PC is still hard to operate for elderly persons, and few of them are interested in social media.

Conclusion

Social media in Japan is very unique and may form a new "Galapagos". And it may be autonomous and ordered network space. Remained challenges are how to make reliable human relationships on the net and networking of elderly people.

References

Haruhiko Okumura, 6. Earthquake and Social Networks, Special Features: Crisis Responses to the Great East Japan Earthquake (in Japanese), *IPSSJ Magazine Vol.52, No.9, 2011*