



**TECHNIUM**  
**SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL**

**Vol. 11, 2020**

**A new decade  
for social changes**

[www.techniumscience.com](http://www.techniumscience.com)

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

## The Media and Social Networks as factors in the ‘Colour Revolutions’

**Nuraddin Mehdiyev**

PhD candidate, The Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

[matlabm@yandex.ru](mailto:matlabm@yandex.ru)

**Abstract.** The purpose of this paper is to determine the roles and influence of the media and social networks on the ‘Colour Revolutions’ and to analyze the research conducted into them. The following methods were employed in the production of this research paper: analysis, synthesis, analogy, deduction, statistical analysis and comparative analysis. **Novel in the article** is the author’s comparison of the research and existing facts concerning the role of the media and social networks in the ‘Colour Revolutions’, while also attempting to define the essence of those events and systematically revealing the role of the media and social networks in their occurrence. **The finding here** is that the media, social networks, blogs and video hosting played a key role in the progress of the ‘Colour Revolutions’. During the first wave in the post-Soviet space, the principal agencies of influence were the traditional media (television and print). There was freedom of the media in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan as the ‘Colour Revolutions’ broke out in those countries (2003-2005). On the eve of those ‘revolutions’ that freedom allowed opposition forces to raise significantly their capacities to influence. The West also implemented its modern strategy of exerting ‘soft power’ via ICT across international politics. The Arab Spring saw parties in opposition relying on the new Internet media. The ruling regimes were unprepared for those challenges and lost the struggle for power. However, one of the main reasons for their defeat was their people’s dissatisfaction with the political-legal and socio-economic regimes they had established. The major powers, largely in control of ICT facilities, used those situations for their own purposes. If the West had not implemented its ‘soft power’ strategy via ICT in the post-Soviet and Middle East zones, the ‘revolutions’ would have been much less likely. Clear evidence of this can be seen in the example of the Gulf countries, which are of interest to the West for their energy resources.

**Keywords.** globalization, revolution, internet, social networks, politics, society

**Introduction.** It is not at all clear which events may be considered a ‘colour revolution’. The ‘Bulldozer Revolution’ in Yugoslavia (2000), ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia (2003), ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine, (2004) and the ‘Poppy Revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan (2005), the ‘Twitter Revolution’ in Moldova (2009), ‘Bolotnaya Square’ in Russia (2011-2012), the ‘Euromaidan’ in Ukraine (2013-2014), and other post-Soviet protests are generally considered to be colour revolutions [16, p. 82]. This categorization, however, does not have global acceptance. Some researchers consider the ‘Arab Spring’ (2011) in the Middle East and events in China and Brazil to be extensions of the colour revolutions.

The term ‘colour revolution’ expresses the redirection of the socio-political activities of groups of protesters attempting to disrupt the control of state organizations by continuously targeting the organs of government and who are coordinated via ICT and media towards a determined political goal. This type of movement, aiming to change the political system, may be described as a complex, multi-faceted process (or chain of political events) with characteristics that are revolutionary, or even those of a coup.

**Purpose of the article.** To define the role and influence of media and social media in colour revolutions and even to define the essence of such ‘colour revolutions’ by analyzing research into this phenomenon.

**Its particularity.** The roles of media and social media are issues widely associated with colour revolutions. The author analyzes the existing research and facts concerned with this theme in a systematic and comparative approach, allowing an identification of the essence of colour revolutions and the roles of media and social networks in their occurrence.

**Research methods.** Analysis, synthesis, analogy, deduction, and statistical and comparative analyses have been used in this research.

The Arab Spring and the other such colour revolutions in post-Soviet countries have received different evaluations in academic discussions. One group of researchers considers them to be beneficial processes leading to natural and positive outcomes in the democratization of society and a rising political culture among people (V. Bans, M.E. McFaul, G. Hale, P. Stompka) [8]. Other researchers believe that they are means of overturning state power and effecting foreign interference in the internal politics of a state with the aim of destabilizing the political system and attempting a coup (John Laughland, Jack Goldstone, A. E. Gapich, D. A. Lushnikov) [11; 12]. There is, however, a common theme to these researches: the existence of similar shared problems in different countries that result in these colour revolutions:

- A cognitive crisis in political science and modern political methodologies (authoritarianism of the political regime);
- Poverty and the lack of a middle class, the basis of modern societies;
- Political crisis as an outcome of poor economic conditions;
- Breakdown of public relations as a result of economic crisis.

### **1. The theoretical foundations of ‘colour revolutions’**

According to Gene Sharp, considered to be the ideologue of the colour revolution, its technology is based on non-violent struggle using soft power (however, it also sometimes takes the form of a bloody fight). Thus, the characteristic features of colour revolutions are as follows [19, p. 6]:

- 1) Various forms of non-violent struggle:
  - Rejection of social cooperation (rallies, caricatures and slogans, convoys, marches, pickets, satire, student strikes, social disobedience, emigration, sociological surveys and fake online profiles artificially propagating negativity and government weaknesses etc.);
  - Rejection of political cooperation (calls to boycott government and state organizations, non-compliance with ‘unjust’ laws, boycotting elections, demanding resignations, rejection of judicial authority etc.);
  - Rejection of economic cooperation (economic boycotts and strikes, developing alternative institutions, markets, transportation systems, parallel governments, blocking information and transport routes, refusing to pay taxes);
  - Non-violent protests and persuasion (evading military service, desertion and forging documentation etc.);

- Non-violent interventions (hunger strikes, public suicides, provocative stunts, road blocks).

2) Colour revolutions are short-term and, as a result of ‘political disobedience’, result in the collapse of the existing ruling regime, a change of political elites and a redistribution of power.

3) The main political force is not a party, but rather a broad coalition of NGOs working in politics, education, culture and medicine; the media; charities; think tanks; volunteer movements; religious communities and sects. Financial support for training and conferences may come from a number of foundations and organizations.

Organizationally, colour revolutions are very complex phenomena. Their tools of struggle include the mass media, flash mobs, PR companies, political scientists and non-governmental organizations, all using the media and internet to pursue the struggle.

At the outbreak of the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan (2003-2005) there was media freedom, because western countries had given this special attention within their programmes of democratization. This enabled the opposition to increase significantly their influence leading up to the revolutions. Journalists were able to directly criticize the governments and the country’s top-level politicians. The positions of the media and the opposition overlapped. Media organizations supported by the West had important roles in the outbreak of those colour revolutions. Thus, colour revolutions may be divided into two categories:

- those carried out via the media;
- those carried out via social media networks.

## **2. Colour revolutions carried out via the media**

The main source of information about the government of Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia was the Rustavi-2 television channel that was established in 1994 and became popular for its opposition to official organizations from 2001. Further, television channels that did not support the opposition, including state-owned channels, willingly or not, gave moral support to the ‘revolutionaries’. A leader of the youth wing of the Rose Revolution stated that three actors played key roles in the opposition’s victory: the Kmara movement, the political parties, especially Mikheil Saakashvili’s National Movement and the Rustavi-2 television channel [2, p. 5].

Rustavi-2’s part in the Rose Revolution may be characterized as follows:

- Achieving an emotional rejection by society of the November 2003 election results;
- Periodical use of social surveys and propaganda to undermine the government’s reputation and build that of the opposition;
- Broadcasting information from ‘independent’ election points boosting the ratings of the Saakashvili National Movement, the leading opposition block, and strengthening support for the movement following the parliamentary elections of 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2003;
- Publishing ‘independent’ exit polls;
- Giving screen time to ‘independent’ experts and representatives of western-oriented NGOs;
- Direct and continuous reporting from meetings and ensuring mobilization for meetings;
- Reporting in detail on the rising wave of protests around the country and calling people to join them after each news broadcast;
- Regulating the organization and movement of the convoys of buses and cars from Saakashvili’s district to Tbilisi;

- Broadcasting the documentary *Bringing Down a Dictator*, about the fall of Slobodan Milosevic's government in Serbia by the Bulldozer Revolution (2000) (General Secretary of the National Movement, Vano Merabishvili told western journalists: "This film played a crucial role. Every protester knew by heart the tactics of the revolution in Belgrade because they had all watched the film. Everyone knew what they had to do. This was a better copy of the previous revolution.") [1]

In Ukraine, the Russian-oriented ruling regime was struggling for power with the opposition, which was supported by the West. This confrontation culminated in the events of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. The advantages held by the opposition were apparent in this struggle. Above all was their ability to put the internet and media to effective and extensive use.

Presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko conducted a very active online campaign. The ruling party of the day was weak in that aspect and even though it filtered the internet and blocked some websites, the network media were prepared for that. They immediately signed up to foreign network zones (com, net, org), changed their addresses for foreign ones and organized copy-servers outside Ukraine. The internet had such an impact on the flow and outcomes of events that some researchers prefer Internet Revolution over the more widely used Orange Revolution [10, p. 94].

During these events, supporters of the Orange Revolution were active indeed in using the internet to break the information blockade and disseminate news to all citizens of Ukraine. The emphatic defeat of the Russian-oriented political forces in Ukraine demonstrates the internet's undeniable role in modern political competition. Andrey Kolodyuk, subsequently leader of the Informasiyonnaya Ukrayna political party supporting Yushchenko, stated that the change of power in the country was possible only thanks to the opposition's active work online [13, p. 102]. Previously the great researcher at the Hoover Institution, Michael McFaul, had stated that the Orange Revolution can be considered the first in history to be organized on the internet [5, p. 63].

The 2005 Poppy Revolution in Kyrgyzstan also featured the media and internet in leading roles. In November 2003, the first independent publishing house was opened in Bishkek, at the initiative and with full support from the American non-governmental organization Freedom House. Its director was the American journalist and Freedom House employee, Mike Stone. Gene Sharp's book, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, which gives practical advice on how to struggle against a regime and *My Capital News* (MSN), the leading newspaper in opposition to President Askar Akayev, were published there with grants from western NGOs [18]. The newspaper made the following important contributions to the preparation and realization of the Poppy Revolution in Kyrgyzstan:

- Publishing materials about corruption and the falsification of election results in order to discredit President Akayev and his family.
- Calling people, especially the youth, to the streets.
- Regulating the actions of protesters and uniting the opposition's political forces.
- Criticizing the regime with a number of public-political talk shows (Our Time, No Going Back) on television.
- Using the experience of Georgia and Ukraine in calling for the rejection of election results to discredit the existing government [9, p. 176-177].

The events of early April 2009 in Moldova developed in similar fashion to the general colour revolution scenario and were characterized as the Twitter Revolution. This was because Twitter, blogs, social networks and internet media were central to what emerged from dissatisfaction with how votes for different political parties were counted. They facilitated the

filling the centre of the capital with aggressive protesters, causing confrontations with law enforcers, and a loss of control over the social and political situations [6]. The Twitter Revolution in Moldova did not achieve an annulment of the election results or replacement of the ruling party, but despite this, it delivered a serious shock to the government.

### **3. Colour Revolutions organised across social networks**

The Colour Revolutions that took place in Balkan and post-Soviet countries, and the civil wars known as the Arab Spring in a number of Arab countries demonstrated that the social situation could be managed and directed via the media and social networks. The Arab Spring civil wars in many north-African and Middle Eastern countries from 2010-2011 (Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria etc.) particularly highlighted the importance of social networks in those countries. People who were shown setting fire to themselves on online media immediately became symbols of heroism; such events became catalysts for the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt.

Protesters in Egypt and Tunisia used the experience of the Euromaidan in Kyiv in posting various propaganda information and images on Facebook:

- 1) Videos showing the demonstrators' courage and determination.
- 2) Extensive information was disseminated about the victims, along with demonstrators' demands for punishment of those responsible.
- 3) Images were posted of the victims of police violence.
- 4) Lists of complaints about the government were posted, as well as poetry, songs, images and other 'revolutionary' materials.
- 5) Detailed instructions were posted, also recommendations on how to protect oneself against the tear gas, water cannons and electric batons used by the police when breaking up demonstrations.

Research into these events show that in fact, while the socio-political processes known as Arab Spring had political, economic and legal causes, their escalation to civil war and the organization of social protests were facilitated by social networks. The civil wars toppled regimes that had ruled for decades (Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen) and the region was engulfed in civil wars and terrorism that continue to this day.

The greater the use of social networks, the greater their influence. However, these networks were not the causes of unrest in those countries, the unrest was due to issues of socio-economics and freedom. Considering that youth are the main users of social networks and in general favour innovation and freedom, we may contend that they are the force driving modern social processes. Social networks constitute mechanisms of social government that can transform dissatisfaction with socio-economic and freedom issues into protests and manage them. Control of these mechanisms lies with governments and organizations that have a hold on the ICT monopoly.

is a Palestinian journalist from Syria who heads one of Al Jazeera's news offices and is regarded as one of the most influential representatives of the Arab world on Twitter, and she described the role of ICT in the Arab Spring as follows: "The principal characteristic of the Arab revolutions is the presence of unorganized people's movements that includes labourers, peasants, students, the youth, the elderly, women, men, the rich, the poor and others. However, only a small proportion of those people have access to the internet and only some of them have a presence on social media networks ... These revolutions would have happened anyway, with or without the internet. The internet has played an important role in the dissemination of

information, the coordination of events and discussions between the upper tiers, but it is neither the principal foundation, nor the trigger mechanism of these revolutions.” [15, p. 190]

A characteristic feature of the role of social networks in the Arab Spring is the high level of their engagement with the events of the civil war and the demonstrations not descending into chaos, but actually being well organized despite there being no obvious leaders. Journalists of the New York Times consider Gene Sharp, whose works have been translated into and who is considered the theoretical and ideological instructor of the colour revolutions, the ideological father of the Arab Spring [7]. His works were used in training by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict in Cairo, the Tunisian opposition was instructed in his ideas, and his work *From Dictatorship to Democracy* is on the website of the Muslim Brothers movement [17].

The Egyptian journalist and a social network activist Ibrahim Alshaghat rightly states: “Social networks had an active role in modifying the youth’s ideological thinking. They opened new horizons for revolutionary and civil ideological action, as well as in information sharing between different sections of Egyptian society” [15, p. 191]

However, the task was not only to change the ideological thinking of different layers of society in Arab countries, but also to test the role of ICT in the course of Arab revolutions and the organization of actions. According to the Moroccan political scientist Yusif Bilal: “Without new means of communication, the protesters would have had great difficulties in coordinating activities. The spread of information, photos and videos via Facebook, Twitter, blogs and media networks enabled the creation of a broad unity.” [15, p. 192]

It was no coincidence that Tunisia and Egypt were at the centre of the Arab Spring, because the governments in those countries had very weak social foundations. Socio-economic concerns and questions of freedom were a major focus, especially for the youth, because the internet gave them a clear view of the life styles in European countries. Research revealed that 90% of Egyptians and Tunisians used Facebook to organize demonstrations and spread information. There were also socio-economic problems and dissatisfaction in other Arab countries, like Syria, Yemen and Libya. But, unlike Tunisia and Egypt, internet access in those countries was very limited. While in Egypt 24% had access to the internet on their personal computers, in Libya the figure was just 6% [14]. There was some use of mobile phones as an alternative. Moreover, uninterrupted live streaming on Western-oriented television channels like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya and the transformation of many mosques in Egypt into ideological centres of the revolution also played their parts [20].

It was also no surprise that after the triumph of the Arab Spring, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that “the internet had become the public space of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” and in stressing that the uprisings were supported by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in the Islamic world, she added that “ICT accelerates political, social and economic transformation” [3].

Henry Kissinger makes it clear in his book *World Order* that conflicts in the Middle East, rather than a struggle against international terrorism, have at their core a policy to distribute the region’s energy market [4, p. 122].

Political scientist Philippe Droz-Vincent believes that social networks and the information spread by Al Jazeera can help to, “increase the number of mass mobilizations” and, “fill the public space with civil resistance”, however, “the fate of the protests depends on the results of confrontation with the security forces and the regime’s ability to organize counter demonstrations and mobilize its own passive social base or support within the country” [15, p. 197]. If such a mobilization is successful, the new means of communication lose their efficacy as tools of organisation. This means that a ruling regime close to the people and upholding social justice cannot be destabilized by ICT.

## References

- [1] Baker P. (2003) Tbilisi's 'Revolution of Roses' Mentored by Serbian Activists // Washington Post. Nov. 24, 2003. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A11577-2003Nov24\\_2.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A11577-2003Nov24_2.html)
- [2] Kandelaki G. (2006). Georgia's Rose Revolution. A Participant's Perspective // United States Institute of Peace. Special Report. <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr167.pdf>
- [3] Le Mond. 16 Fevrier 2011.
- [4] Kissinger H. (2014). World Order. New York: Penguin Press. 432 p.
- [5] McFaul M. (2007). Ukraine Imports Democracy. External Influences on the Orange. Парадигмы и процессы Revolution // International Security. Vol. 32. № 2 <https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec.2007.32.2.45#.WMHM8IUrKUK>
- [6] Morozov E. (2009). Moldova's Twitter Revolution // The New Foreign Policy. [http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/04/07/moldovas\\_twitter\\_revolution](http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/04/07/moldovas_twitter_revolution)
- [7] Stolberg Sheryl Gay (2011). [Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution](https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all), New York Times. [https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)
- [8] Bans V. (2016). «Tsvetnyye revolyutsii» cherez vybory: pochemu oni proizoshli i kto sleduyushchiy?// Institut obshchestvennogo proyektirovaniya. <http://www.inop.ru/reading/Bunce/>
- [9] Bishkekskiy perevorot: tyul'panovoye blyudo na aziatskoy kukhne // Oranzhevyye seti: ot Belgrada do Bishkeka. Otv. Red. Narochitskaya H.A. Spb., 2008, s. 6-21.
- [10] Bykov I.A. (2009). Geopoliticheskiye posledstviya «revolyutsii tvittera» v Moldavii // Problemy global'noy politiki i bezopasnosti v sovremennoy Rossii: Materialy mezhdunarod. nauch. konf. — SPb.: Balt. gos. tekhn. un-t.
- [11] Gapich A.E., Lushnikov D.A. (2014). Tekhnologii «tsvetnykh revolyutsiy». M.: RIOR, 132 P.
- [12] Goldstoun D. K (2016). Teorii revolyutsii chetvertogo pokoleniya // Intelros. [http://www.intelros.ru/pdf/logos\\_05\\_2006/goldstoun\\_58-103\\_logos.pdf](http://www.intelros.ru/pdf/logos_05_2006/goldstoun_58-103_logos.pdf)
- [13] Gromova A.V. (2009). Rol' i mesto mass-media v podgotovke i provedenii «tsvetnykh revolyutsiy». Diss. na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni k. filolog. n. M. <http://www.rad.pfu.edu.ru:8080/tmp/avtoref4465.pdf>
- [14] Dannyye yezhegodnika TSRU. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>
- [15] Zheltov V. V., Zheltov M. V. Internet, protestnyye dvizheniya i arabskaya vesna. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/internet-protestnye-dvizheniya-i-arabskaya-vesna>
- [16] Narochitskaya, N.A. (2008). Oranzhevyye seti: ot Belgrada do Bishkeka / N.A. Narochitskaya – SPb.: Aleteyya,. – 208 p.
- [17] Surkov N. Amerikanskiy «otets» arabskikh revolyutsiy // «Nezavisimaya gazeta», 18.02.2011. [http://www.ng.ru/world/2011-02-18/1\\_revolutions.html](http://www.ng.ru/world/2011-02-18/1_revolutions.html)
- [18] «Fridom khauz» v Kirgizii // Golos Ameriki. 03.04.2005. URL: <http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/a-33-2005-04-03-voa4/656985.html#>
- [19] Sharp, D. (2005). Ot diktatury k demokratii / D. Sharp. – M.: Novoye izd-vo, 82 p.
- [20] [https://ru.qwe.wiki/wiki/Social\\_media\\_and\\_the\\_Arab\\_Spring](https://ru.qwe.wiki/wiki/Social_media_and_the_Arab_Spring)