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Media and conflict: An assessment of the evidence

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Abstract: This article assesses the evidence used in arguments for the role of the media in conflict and post-conflict situations. It focuses on two broad areas within the literature. First, it examines literature on the contribution of media in war to peace transitions, including an assessment of the evidence used to show how the media may contribute to violent conflict and how they may provoke, or hinder, post-conflict reconstruction. Second, it assesses evidence used in arguments for the role new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet and mobile phones may have in liberation or oppression in developing country contexts. Through reviewing some of the most significant papers that were systematically selected in a literature review on media and conflict, our findings suggest that there are serious gaps in the evidence and the majority of evidence is located in the 'grey literature' or policy documents. The article concludes by suggesting future research agendas to address these gaps.

Key words: ICTs, media and conflict, media and development, liberation technology

1 Introduction

There is an unprecedented emphasis among international policy makers on the potential of freedom of expression and new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to encourage democratization and development in conflict and post-conflict states. ICTs have been credited with having central roles in the recent political uprisings across the Arab world while the development of a 'free media' system is regarded as a central component for post-conflict rebuilding from Iraq and Afghanistan to Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The ways in which people

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receive and transmit information are rapidly evolving. The growth of the mobile phone market in Africa has been connecting villages, cities and diaspora communities to new media content while satellite television and online news are forcing dramatic changes among more traditional media outlets. Assessing evidence of the democratizing role and impact of these rapidly emerging and shifting phenomena is a challenge. In this article, we seek to review a complex and disparate body of academic literature in an effort to discern what evidence is available to assess whether or not media (we have looked beyond new technologies to older mass media forms as well) is influencing and informing populations affected by violent conflict.

We start from the view that while communication matters in conflict environments, it is unclear how and in what cases. The existing debate on media's role largely focuses around two main possibilities, its role in promoting peace, democracy and good governance, or its contrasting role in provoking violence and its susceptibility to political capture by autocratic governments. Much of the evidence for the impact of media comes from journalists and media experts writing about their own industry. There are few independent accounts of the impact media and technology has and the sector as a whole 'lacks a clear evidence base that illustrates the impact and significance of its activities' (Abbott, 2006: 187).

This study aims to contribute to a critical but constructive enquiry by interrogating what information exists for the claims that the media does actually have a central role in facilitating revolutions or promoting peace and reconciliation.

In framing our question we examine the evidence around the role of information and communications in political outcomes in contexts of violent conflict and transition. The question encompasses ideas of the media as an independent source of information, as a tool for influencing attitudes and behaviour and, particularly in the form of social media and mobile technology, as a catalyst for political action.

The findings of this article have implications for policy. Media is one of the tools in the 'stabilization toolbox' used by both American and British stabilization teams[1] and one of the governance ingredients in the state building agenda.[2] The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, has invested large sums to build a network of radio stations across Afghanistan over the past decade and as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasized the central role of ICTs in shaping American 'Public Diplomacy 2.0' agenda. In the current environment of 'techno-euphoria' optimism drives policies about media freedom, empowerment and the liberating and developmental role of freedom of expression. In these heady times it is helpful to step back and question, what evidence exists for the claims made for the impact and complex role of media in such contexts?

This article proceeds by introducing the research approach taken to assess the field and we then review the evidence in two main sections: the role of the media in war to peace transitions, and the role of the media in facilitating political change. We conclude by discussing the impact of these findings through a discussion of the gaps in the evidence and possible future research directions that will contribute to filling these gaps.

II Towards a systematic approach for a complex area

The methodology for reviewing the evidence has been designed as part of a larger project in which our research component was one part. The Justice and Security Research Programme[3] at the London School of Economics embarked on an ambitious effort to map evidence across different international development sectors including gender, conflict, security, climate, resources and transitional justice. In brief, a team of student researchers intensively searched key databases and graded the information found in the searches. The goal

of this approach was to produce an evidence base as free from bias as possible, a shared methodology across evidence papers that could establish a baseline that can be repeated by others at future points as a means of assessing changes in the field. It was also an attempt to identify the types of 'evidence' that emerges when researchers seek out secondary data for designing new studies and determining what is known and where major gaps in the field are.

The database search consisted of three sets of keywords: one for different kinds of media ('media', 'internet', 'ICT', 'mobile technology', 'television', 'radio'), the second for different sets of communication process ('voice', 'political participation', 'public debate', 'protest', 'dialogue', 'negotiation', 'coup' and 'insurgency'), and the third for political context ('conflict', 'post-conflict', 'political transition', 'revolution', 'election', 'regime change', 'governance' and 'fragile states').[4]

This search string was conducted across 19 major journal databases[5] that identified 22,000 potentially relevant papers. The articles were then filtered by country and included: Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, Congo, Zaire, Uganda, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Bosnia, Kosovo, Ukraine, Georgia, Philippines and Guatemala. These countries were selected either because media and technology have been strongly associated with recent political events or there were significant claims for the role of media and communication technology in popular uprisings leading to political transitions. In the Philippines, for example, the use of SMS in the ousting of President Estrada has been credited as the first 'mobile revolution' (Castells , 2009; Shirky, 2011). The findings were narrowed further by publication date to include material after 1990 and the fall of the Berlin Wall to capture some of the most dramatic political changes in recent history. Books were not included in this structured database search, and the use of empirical evidence was a requirement for inclusion and was the most limiting factor. At the end of this search, after the filters of publication date and country were applied, the findings were cut from 22,000 to just 32 papers.

There are significant limits to this approach. First, there are clear constraints in the process of selecting keywords: focusing on broadcast, print and digital media excluded a body of literature on political voice and traditional communication forms such as poetry and music but the authors concluded that this was a distinct corpus of work that would be well served by further dedicated research. And as with any prescriptive approach to gathering evidence, setting boundaries excludes material that may be relevant but does not meet all the criteria. This strategy was no different, and consequently the search excluded well-known key pieces of literature, particularly from outside academic journals.

Given the limitations of the structured database search, we complemented it with additional search exercises. We have drawn on our previous experience with the literature in this field to provide a context for the papers. There was also a peer review with fourteen prominent authors and practitioners selected by the authors in the field of media and technology for development. The peer reviewers were invited to select the five most influential papers in the field, with the aim of assessing whether the papers with the most substantive evidence identified through the database search were identified by the peer review field as the most significant papers.

Many of the peer responses we received were dominated by information from 'grey-literature', which consists of evaluations and reports on development projects, case studies of specific examples and specially commissioned technical studies by donors or implementing agencies. This information is not held in academic databases and often not even in the public domain, and was therefore missed by the systematic search. One might conclude that for an emerging field such as new technology and political participation, such

database searches do not provide a reliable indication of the state of information. Given the overwhelming focus on media in western societies at the expense of developing countries, grey literature seems to be a particularly important resource for potential evidence about the role of media in conflict and post-conflict societies. This work is not usually peer reviewed and much of it is not actually founded on data that is systematically collected and analyzed but rather offers arguments or anecdotal stories about the role of media in conflict or crisis situations.

Around the time this article was being prepared, there was a concerted effort by some of the larger media development organizations to consolidate work in this area (Gagliardone, 2010). This is interesting for our evidence paper because it also refers to a major gap that media development practitioners have identified – they feel that their work is important but they struggle to 'prove' its impact.

Overall, the evidence produced through the database search is relatively weak. The papers that emerged from the combined searches suggest some systemic gaps. Most of the papers that survived the filter had a combination of data sources. Twelve papers contained interview based data, nine papers contained data based on observation, six contained primary quantitative data gathered for the paper, six contained an examination of existing datasets and six contained data based on analysis of media contents. Most of the articles focussed on a single case study. The role of media in Rwanda emerged as a recurring example. The types of media also varied, with one of the articles examining quantitative data-sets of Twitter users in Iran, Egypt and Tunisia, and another examining radio soap opera in Rwanda and Congo. Studies of radio – specific stations or specific programmes – dominated, with a total of 10 studies. Six studies were of radio in Rwanda, three of radio in Uganda and one in Afghanistan. Only a few studies looked at social media or communications technology. Of these, three examined social media and the Arab Spring, a fourth looked at websites during the Ukrainian revolution and the fifth documented a civic education project that gave out pink and silver MP3 players to female and male Afghans.

The search did not identify any papers that looked at either media or communications technology as part of planned 'governance' initiatives. This is a significant gap in light of the recent focus by the international development sector on the potential for media to give citizens voice and promote accountability[6] as well as claims for social media and technology's role in the Arab Spring.[7]

Only eight studies used data either directly from, or that documented media's impact on, end-users themselves. Most studies examined the quality or nature of print or broadcast programme contents, conducted historiographies or relied exclusively on quantitative datasets. Four studies conducted comparisons over time. Two of these examined events during the Arab Spring, of which one was a comparison of the number of Twitter users, and the other a mixed methods comparison of blogger behaviour during the 2006 and 2008 Egyptian revolutions.

With few exceptions there was a lack of methodological clarity. Many of the papers gave very little explanation of the methodology used to gather the data on which the argument was made. There was also a wide variance in the clarity of explanation of the methodology used to gather and assess evidence.

The paper proceeds by exploring the debates and evidence that dominated the search under two main themes: the role of the media in war to peace transitions and the role of new technologies in facilitating political change. A final section offers some conclusions and recommendations for further research to address some of the major gaps identified in this evidence mapping exercise.

III The role of media in war to peace transitions

Research on the role of the media in war to peace transitions grew significantly in the

1990s. Stemming from the early conflicts in the 1990s- particularly Rwanda and Bosnia, authors examined the role of the media in promoting conflict as well as encouraging reconciliation and peace-building. This literature closely correlates with the literature on media and democratization and media and development both of which also attracted renewed research interest with the transitions in Eastern Europe. The evidence can be structured around two main areas: the role of the media in conflict and the potential for the media to either contribute to or hinder post-conflict peace-building and development.

1 The role of media in contributing to violent conflict

There is a long history of research on media and propaganda in war, much of which started during the World War II. More recently there have been attempts to understand the unique issues of media reform and transitions to peace in conflict/post-conflict countries. During the mid to late 1990s interest in this field grew partly as a product of the Rwandan genocide and the concurrent civil war in the Balkans.

The papers identified in the structured database search reflect the dominant paradigm about the role of the media in conflict and post-conflict transitions: namely that a free and independent media should be an integral part of such transitions and constructing a western-styled media system should be a priority at the inception of international interventions. Only the peer-review search identified a few papers that question these assumptions (Allen and Stremlau, 2006; Putzel and van der Zwan, 2006).

Assessing the degree to which the dominant paradigm is based on evidence is hard, as much of the literature on media and conflict rests within the grey literature and our peer reviewers also cited some literature that is difficult to obtain because it includes monitoring and evaluation studies which are not always in the public domain. These studies are usually commissioned by a relatively small number of organizations, such as Fondation Hirondelle, BBC Media Action, Internews or Search for Common Ground.

Claims for the role of media in promoting or addressing conflict and social change assume that the media directly influences its audience, an assumption shared by most of the papers identified in the database search. It was significant that the few papers that critically engaged with this assumption, such as a study of Rwandan Radio Television de Milles Collines' impact on genocide (Straus 2007) included research that examined the impact of media on audiences. Straus' study, by assessing the impact from the perspective of end-users, suggests that the 'instrumental' claims made for the impact of media in other studies are often overstated, in part because they fail to account for the wider context in which audiences exist.

Most of the evidence that came up in our literature search fits within this vein: the broader context or environment was seldom analyzed in-depth but was rather dominated by a focus on the ways in which media were seen to be either instigating violence or 'injecting' peaceful ideas into the populous.

Acayo and Mnjama's (2004) study of print media in Northern Uganda is a good example of this instrumentalist view. Like much of the media for democratization literature, its underlying premise is that 'access to information implies a form of empowerment, or better still, it signifies freedom from ignorance, freedom from servitude and ultimately freedom to choose' (Acayo and Mnjama, 2004). Although the study is based on content analysis, a methodology common in media studies, its conclusion diverges from the dominant trend, arguing that '[O]n the whole, these newspapers contributed more to the escalation of conflict than to its resolution'. Despite departing from the optimistic norm, because the paper has no end-user engagement, it rests on the same assumptions about the impact of media on its audiences.

Only two papers explicitly outlined the mechanisms through which media influenced

audiences, and both examined how radio contributed to reconciliation through studying the same donor financed radio soap opera in Rwanda. Although Staub and Weiss' (2007) theory of change is a well constructed combination of psychological change and media effects theory, it lacks any empirical evidence of its impact. This evidence is developed by Paluck and Green's (2009) one-year randomized control trial on audiences of the same radio drama. Significantly, this study is able to make compelling claims for increases in audience tolerance as a result of exposure to the peace drama, based on direct audience research (ibid., 637).

Much of the policy related literature is strong on recommendations, but lacks empirical data beyond limited case studies. Loewenberg's study (Loewenberg, 2006) uses the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) as a case study to make recommendations for greater reflection on UN peacekeeping and communication strategies more generally in the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) (Hunt, 2006), several of which are shared by William Orme in his paper *Broadcasting in UN Blue: the Unknown Past and Uncertain Future of Peacekeeping Radio* (Orme, 2010).

Orme, an experienced United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) official and media researcher, also adopts a case study approach in his investigation of efforts the UN has undertaken in supporting, establishing and running radio stations in peacekeeping contexts. Orme bases his paper on media sources, UN policy documents and Security Council resolutions as well as several academic papers. Despite a lack of substantive evidence, Orme argues that UN radio is the most influential media development activity the UN engages in – even if DPKO is not explicitly mandated to this end.

The only literature that emerged from the evidence search that took a critical approach to the prevailing media approaches in post-war situations was an article by Emily Berman (2007), *Democratizing the Media*. This article drew on much of the literature that was recognized by the peer reviewers as being central to this field. Berman cites the work by Allen and Stremlau and Putzel and van der Zwan (Allen and Stremlau, 2005; Putzel and van der Zwan, 2006). The evidence presented in this law review article applies the theoretical arguments to case studies from me-dia development efforts in Bosnia (non-UN) and Kosovo (UNMIK). Berman argues that free media operating in a stable democracy are both a cause and a consequence of this very stability, justifying a departure from classic liberal democratic principles towards more controlling measures in the early days of newly established media. Sources include policy documents and handbooks, academic literature, legislation and case law.

Unlike much of the other case study work, Berman's use of case study evidence contributes a substantive critical perspective to the question of media's role in opening up new political spaces, despite using only existing literature and evidence that has already been documented.

2 Assessing the evidence that the media contribute or hinder post-conflict peace-building and development

There is a long and rich history of literature that has sought to identify the link between media and wider political and economic development, but which was completely missed by the structured database search. It is important literature, as it reflects a context that much of the literature identified in the search lacks. In the 1950s, the debate focused on how the radio could influence both state institutions and public opinions to 'modernize' developing countries (Blake, 1979; Lerner, 1958; Lerner and Schramm, 1967; Schramm, 1964).[8] While this approach has been controversial for decades, with critics arguing it was merely a form of colonization,[9] it remains influential and this legacy can continue to be seen in

many NGO and IGO media development projects – and within the ICT for development practice.

The idea of media as a democratizing and liberating force continues to dominate much of the development and democratization literature. And while media as a liberating force has developed a body of expertise, approaches and 'best practices', there remains little substantive evidence beyond anecdote and the reliance of normative indicators for the actual impact of this work.

Press freedom is typically seen as one of the key indicators of the degree of democratic freedoms, seen in the proliferation of press freedom and media development indicators by international organizations such as Freedom House and IREX. While such measures of press freedom tell us little about media's effect, they have had a strong role in advancing a normative view of the media.

One peer reviewer observed a renewed effort to 'prove' the link between a 'free media' and democratization as part of the development community's emphasis on the 'good governance' agenda, led by the World Bank, DFID and others. Media indices are now incorporated into the World Bank Institute's Governance Indicators, with efforts to bring this data together through the Media Map project led by the World Bank, The Brookings Institute and Internews.[10] However, there has been some critical interrogation of these media freedom indicators that were cited in the peer review, for example a recent publication 'Evaluating the Evaluators' that has analyzed the role and impact of media rankings such as Freedom House. The book contains a variety of perspectives on the issue, but its broad recommendation is that those working in the sector need to 'continue to refine their methodology by increasing technical sophistication, cultural neutrality, and transparency and that they incorporate digital media into their evaluations' (Price *et al.*, 2011: 4).

Most research in this area examines aid funded governance reform initiatives. These initiatives are rooted in normative ideas of what constitutes good governance – a norm and ideal that is rooted in the experience of western democracies. None of the media and governance literature identified through the database search engaged with critical governance literature that emphasize looking beyond the reform of formal institutions and instead understanding the 'structures, relationships, interests and incentives that underpin them' (Unsworth, 2010) and the 'hybridity' of formal and informal governance mechanisms (Boege *et al.*, 2009).

Even the more critical literature identified in the database review still focused on western models, often proposing adaptations to reflect local contexts. Writing on media's role in an 'African public sphere' Mwangi urges the expansion of German philosopher Habermas' model of the Public Sphere '[T]o include traditional African public spaces, such as marketplaces' (2010: 1). Although at the margins of such debates, Mwangi's argument, and other such as Mouffe (2000) highlights the normative position that western, Habermasian notions of the public sphere hold in much of the governance related media development literature. However, the papers limited evidence base weakens Mwangi's argument, drawing only on content analysis of one newspaper for three countries (Kenya, Uganda and Zambia).

The media's role in holding governments to account and increasing transparency dominates most governance literature. Research makes the same assumptions about the impact of the media in promoting accountability as it does in promoting wider development and modernization. Such arguments are elaborated in publications such as The World Bank's book, *The Right to Tell* (Islam *et al.*, 2002) which emphasizes the link between a free media and economic growth and encapsulated in Amartya Sen's famous quote 'no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free

press' (1999:6). The media development NGO Internews encapsulates this ideology when it argues:

> Media play a critical role in fostering transparency and accountability in governance and society. They serve a crucial watchdog function, providing citizens with the information they need to keep the public and private sectors accountable … (Internews, 2011: 1)

Our research search turned up little documented evidence to support the arguments that there is a direct correlation between a free press and less corruption in the least developed countries. After all, one peer reviewer noted that some of the countries with the most vibrant media in Africa – Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria – have the highest rates of government corruption while other states with more restrictive media environments have some of the lowest rates of corruption.

The peer reviewers also noted that despite the existence of a few empirical studies of media's role in state accountability (Besley and Burgess, 2002; Reinikka and Svensson, 2004), the structured evidence review found no articles that actually set out to test this relationship. Instead, most of the work that was identified through the evidence review was, studies of projects set-up under normative assumptions of the role of media and technology in enhancing state performance. The article most referenced as evidence of this link examines a Ugandan education public expenditure tracking initiative that links the publishing of school budget allocations in newspapers to a reduction in corruption. The study argues that 'capture was reduced from 80 per cent in 1995 to less than 20 per cent in 2001' (Reinikka and Svensson, 2004: 2). This article was one that the authors would have expected to come up in the literature search, and its notable absence raises further questions about the value of such structured searches.

In addition, our peer reviewers highlighted other documents important in the field but missed by our search. Two surveys of the different applications of the use of technology and social media for transparency and accountability purposes were missed by the database search. The first is a study by students at the London School of Economics for Transparency International that maps projects that use social media tools to reduce corruption (Bekri *et al.*, 2011). The second is a report by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative that maps interventions using technology to strengthen accountability (Avila *et al.*, 2011). Although missing from the structured database survey, both studies are essentially desk based reviews and interviews with experts in the field. They do not extend to full impact evaluations or in-depth assessments of end-user perspectives.

These take a normative approach to governance – that the functions of state institutions are inherently good and their effectiveness measured by the degree of transparency, accountability and responsiveness. Peer reviewers pointed out that in the wider governance literature there is a move to consider governance beyond this focus on the formal institutions of the state – both in terms of research and also for development assistance. Research from the Centre for the Future State at the Institute for Development Studies explored '[H]ow elements of public authority are created through complex processes of bargaining between state and civil society actors and the interaction of formal and informal institutions' (Unsworth, 2010: 1). Efforts to understand the role of media and technology in the complex processes of governance and wider development could benefit from adopting the same approaches, and examining the way audiences interact with media content and institutions, and how they fit into a wider process of establishing public authority. This suggests focussing on understanding what people do with the media they have access to and the importance of moving beyond simple metrics of access or assessments of their functionality in relation to western-based state functions.

IV Debate and literature on technology and political voice

We now turn to examining the role of technology in political voice. The quest for evidence described in the beginning of this article has partly been directed in response to the debates around the role of technology in the popular uprisings across the Middle East. Research and debate around the potential of social media and technology is rooted in two distinct but complementary agendas. The first is the potential for technology to act as a more general 'liberating' force through enabling activist and civil society networks to subvert autocracies and oppression. The second is the debates around the role of technology in furthering the technical functions of good governance, particularly the processes of transparency and accountability, which are supported by donors and agencies such as DFID, the World Bank and UNDP. We consider each of these approaches in turn.

1 Evidence for a liberating or an oppressive role?

Public debate on the role of new technology is often characterized by its poles – those who argue that technology is an ultimately liberating force while others argue that technology actually strengthens the state more than the people, and autocratic – leaning states in particular. The academic literature tends to chart a position somewhere in between. Clay Shirky is one of the leading proponents of the argument that technologies have played a pivotal role in social change, and that the rise of social media and mobile phones is one of those technologies (2011). He argues that increased access to the internet and mobile telephones means, '[T]he networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action' (Shirky, 2011). Others, such as Malcolm Gladwell argue that focussing on the technology misses the point: '[P]eople protested and brought down governments before Facebook was invented. They did it before the Internet came along.' (Gladwell, 2011: 1). While others, such as Evgeny Morozov (2011), argue that technology actually strengthens the power of the oppressive state more than it does the activist. These authors, who are widely cited, have put forward high profile theories but the structured database search identified very little evidence for any of these hypotheses.

One strand of the argument made by proponents of the liberating power of technology is that communication affects political outcomes, and that social media is a form of communication so different from what went before that as a result they change political outcomes. For example, broadcast media is described as a one-way communication process highly controlled by states able to influence audiences as passive receivers of 'injected' messages, who would subsequently carry out predetermined actions. Social media and mobile technologies change this dynamic through their two-way nature and freedom from state control. These forms of communication are asynchronous and decentralized, so less susceptible to control and able to reach large numbers of people very quickly, enabling social mobilization in a way that one way broadcast media cannot (Shirky, 2008; Diamond, 2010). Finally, they allow people to be 'producers', not just passive consumers of information. This enables marginalized individuals or communities to articulate political voice and project political ideas in ways that were previously impossible with broadcast media that was easily controlled (Shirky, 2008).

The structured database search found very little supporting evidence for these arguments and most of the evidence it did identify was descriptive of single events and/or quantitative. For example, a description of the new space created by blogs and online discussion forums in the Ukrainian revolution shows how the internet enabled new public platforms for opposition voices and marginalized perspectives (Filippova, 2007).

Yet the impact of these new platforms and their significance for end-users, and for political outcomes, is not examined. Similarly, a description of the surge in Twitter users counts the number of messages sent during uprisings in Iran, Tunisia and Egypt, focusing on the numbers rather than the actual impact these technologies have on the people who use them (Kavanaugh *et al.*, 2011). How important were blogs or tweets for political change? The research doesn't answer these questions.

The importance of conducting end-user research was highlighted by the more nuanced insights offered by the few papers identified through the database search which did investigate how people actually used technology. Faris' mixed methods study of the role of Egyptian bloggers in mobilizing protest in 2006 and 2008 (Faris, 2010) demonstrates the limited relationship between online blogging activities and physical world mobilization, providing a counter weight to the claims for technology in driving protest.

Faris' work also suggests that social media and technology do change the way information flows through communities. However, his mixed method, end-user oriented study that included qualitative interviews, observation, content analysis and process tracing leads him to suggest that these changes are only significant '[T]hrough their interaction effects with independent media outlets and on-the-ground organizers' (Faris, 2010: viii). Faris' study helps emphasize that avoiding the blind alleys of normative approaches to technology and political analysis requires examining the use of technology in its context and from the perspective of its users. It is notable just how much this was lacking from the majority of the literature identified through the structured database search and the peer consultations.

Most studies in this area assume information and communication play a central role in processes of change but lack a theory of change or explanation for the way this happens. Instead, because the technology or media is new or different, it must have different effects. Studies identified in the database search that do actually look at how people use technology or media suggest that the revolutionary effect of new technologies is less than claimed by proponents of the liberation technology thesis.

2 New technologies and development

As previously mentioned in this article, the peer consultation identified two documents that looked technology's role in good governance and state building, (Avila *et al.*, 2011; Bekri *et al.*, 2011) which map case studies of the use of social media and technology to counter corruption and promote good governance. Indicative of most studies in this field, they focus on macro interventions, such as media coverage of state spending on education or improvements in the quality of citizen – state relationships, for example, the speed of response to starving populations rather than considering how technology was actually used by citizens.

Most of the work identified through the peer review on technology's role in good governance is framed within a normative idea of the state – crudely characterized as a liberal democracy with the media and technology supporting citizen – state relations. In both Transparency International and the Transparency and Accountability Initiatives' mapping of technology initiatives state functions are a given and there is an assumed value to technology that helps citizens hold power to account through making information more accessible, reporting on service provision performance and the performance of state institutions. The legitimacy or appropriateness of the structures and institutions for a particular context, particularly ideas of accountability and corruption in conflict or fragile states, is as unquestioned as the role of media in the media and democratization literature.

Claims that technology can contribute to development through strengthening good governance are the most recent addition to a well-established body of literature on ICTs in development that has historically

focussed on sectors such as health, education and economic growth (Heeks, 2010). Yet the technology liberation literature identified through the database search appears divorced from this wider body of work, and is presented without historical context or reference to theoretical precedents. Consequently, many of the claims made are presented in language that suggests they are new, paradigm shifting and unlike anything that has gone before.

Not only does much of the liberation technology and governance literature fail to engage with the wider canon in its own field, it appears to be ignorant of recent developments in the policy literature on governance, strengthening the impression that the technology and governance literature in conflict and fragile states is largely divorced from historic as well as wider contemporary debates.

This is important, as trends in governance research have implications for understanding the role of technology in political processes. In the wider governance research agenda there is a growing emphasis to consider an end-user perspective on how political processes and settlements are reached – a marked departure from the traditional state centric view (Unsworth, 2010). In this emerging literature normative conceptions of state institutions, functions and processes are unpacked from citizens perspectives (Kuriyan and Ray, 2009) and replaced with ideas of hybridity and informal governance (Luckham and Kirk, 2012). That these forms of governance reflect the reality people experience and is based on research that emphasizes understanding the perspective of ordinary citizens or end-users.

Efforts to understand the role of information and communication in conflict and fragile environments have, in the main, not kept pace with these new approaches. To really understand the role of media and technology in governance processes requires adopting the same perspective that has led to new insights in the governance arena – a focus on how ordinary people use and experience these new technologies, and asking if they are in fact liberated in ways that were previously impossible.

V Conclusion: The state of evidence and knowledge gaps

In 'An agenda for researching African media', the South African scholar Tawana Kupe suggests the need to '[R]evisit the debate about the institutional roles of the journalism, media and communication structures in our context by more critically and rigorously interrogating the fashionable liberal notion of media and democracy' (2004: 353–4). The challenges presented by the development of the media systems and hybrid politics in much of the developing world suggest that the media plays a rather different role than is often assumed. Normative discourses related to media freedoms are often reinterpreted or employed for different purposes while local perspectives on the role of media from the government, journalists and media consumers are insufficiently explored and understood.

The massive growth in mobile phone penetration has brought changes to the media environment, particularly the hybridization of radio and mobile that is enabling new forms of public conversation and political debate through live call in programmes. Mobile phones also present opportunities to change the way government services are provided and for public scrutiny of state performance. They are heralded with claims of changes to peoples' relationships to family, friends and political processes. Yet these changes, and claims for their impact, particularly in contexts of violent conflict and transition, remain unexamined.

Within the existing literature, there is insufficient evidence to support the vast and ambitious claims about the role of the media and technology in contexts of violent conflict and transition for informing, influencing political choice and the broader empowerment of end-users. It is not that these claims are untrue, but that they are unproven.

These vast and ambitious claims frequently rest on oft told examples. One such apocryphal example is the already mentioned economists' Reinikka and Svensson's account of how the amount of Ugandan government education expenditure that reached schools increased when newspapers published federal allocations (2004). Yet under more detailed examination this account is contested. Hubbard's examination of the story through substantive qualitative research and a consideration of the wider context of newspaper consumption and distribution patterns points to the importance of other factors, such as high level political will and budget increases amongst the broader aid environment, which together challenge the prevailing narrative of a dominant role for newspapers in countering corruption (2007).

The structured database search identified no substantive evidence beyond case study and description for the role of technology in governance processes. Much of the arguments that were identified were based on normative ideas of the state that are not made explicit or critiqued. There was no evidence for the role of technology in governance processes in conflict or fragile environments. The literature on the role of technology – and particularly social media – in the formal governance processes of transparency and accountability is not contextualized within the literature of technology in other development 'sectors' such as health, agriculture or even e-government.

The research that emerged through the evidence search is narrow and takes an instrumental view. The studies are largely focused on the examination of one type of media or one type of programme. The examination of new technologies defaults to studies of the quantitative data that these technologies produce. This focus excludes examination of the wider context, the interplay between different forms of media and different forms of data. Theories of media and technologies role in processes of change are implicit and lack critique or engagement with prior theory in the technology field or contemporary debates in the fields of governance and development.

There was also a limited amount of independent literature on this topic. Much of the literature that was identified by both the database search and the peer consultation was based on documents that were produced by or linked to the organizations involved in the projects being discussed. While this is not to cast aspersions on the quality of the evidence, the authors have heard policy makers and donors complain that it's hard to trust information from a source that has a vested interest in the project or sector. If media and technology has a role to play in processes of change then appropriate support is required, and it would serve both the quality of the work and quality of support if there was more independent, credible evidence about its impact.

There is significant scope for new research – not only in the gathering of local level empirical data including research among the 'end-user level' affected communities but also in developing larger, quantitative, comparative studies. The literature suggests consideration of the wider context and use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods leads to the most in-depth understanding of the role media and communication plays in informing and influencing political choice and creating spaces for political voice.

Understanding change over time is also important. Most studies are snapshots or case studies of particular incidences – a single popular uprising, the relationship between media and specific political events. Research over longer periods of time, such as the comparison between Egyptian protests in 2006 and 2008 provide compelling insights that studies of moments, such as snapshots of numbers of Twitter users in Iran, are unable to provide. There is a need for more rigorous and in-depth evidence of the role that different kinds of information and different ways of

communicating play in broader processes of change over a sustained period.

There is almost no evidence of the role that media and technology play in hybrid spaces of governance. Where governance is characterized by an absent state and interactions between formal and informal systems of governance, the role for media and technology in political choice and end-user voice cannot be assumed to be the same as in stable political environments. How these new forms of communication interact with traditional forms of political dialogue, negotiation and settlement is as yet unexplored.

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Notes

1. See, for example, 'Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction from the United States Institute of Peace and United States Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, 2009.
2. See, for example, the World Bank Institute Governance Indicators: http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp
3. This project is funded by the British Governments Department for International Development.
4. These keywords were selected by subject matter specialists with additional guidance from librarians at the London School of Economics library.
5. These were used by all evidence papers and included: Scopus, ISI, IBSS, EBSCO (selecting Peace Research Abstracts, International Development Abstracts, International Political Science Abstracts, Race Relations Abstracts, Historical Abstracts, Criminal Justice Abstracts), Proquest Dissertations and Thesis, DART Europe, Information Society, OAISTER, Google Scholar, Refseek, Library catalogue, COPAC, Worldcat, Nexis, Bloglines, Technorati, African Dissertation, CIAO and Westlaw.
6. Making Governance Work for the Poor, DFID, 2006; Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform, World Bank, 2009.
7. **Shirky, C.** 2011: The political power of social media. *Foreign Affairs* 90, 1–9.
8. Daniel Lerners' *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* is perhaps the most referenced contribution to this field. Lerner argues that societies can move from being 'traditional' to 'modern' through stimulating the growth of five variables including urbanization, literacy, mass media exposure, wider economic participation and political participation. Similarly, Everett Rogers in 1962 built upon Lerner's research with a diffusion of innovations theory that essentially argued that the 'persuasive powers' of the communications media to change beliefs and behaviours could be an essential tool in increasing productivity within communities. Another classic of modernization theory was Wilbur Schramm's *Mass Media and Development: The Role of Information in Developing Countries* which argues that 'underdeveloped countries have underdeveloped communications systems' (41) but the mass media can work to bridge the gap between rich and poor by facilitating social transformation and national development efforts.
9. By the 1970s the modernization agenda fell out of favour and was criticized for its top down approach and for suggesting the ignorance and lack of agency of those being studied. Critics noted that linear pre-structured approaches to modernization failed to take into account local realities that may not even need to be entirely destroyed for modernization to occur. Additionally, the suggestion that somehow Europeans or Americans can come in and teach others, via the radio, to be western or modern was seen as not only patronizing but arrogant.
10. http://www.mediamapresource.org/

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