# Chapter 15
# Information Control, Transparency, and Social Media:
## Implications for Corruption

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## ABSTRACT

*Although the research linking social media and corruption is still in infancy, it provides important insights. It has been shown that social media can prove to be an important tool in fighting corruption. At the same time, freedom on the net is under threat in many parts of the world with governments using a variety of methods, including designing vague and flexible security laws as well as employing technological means, to censor the content that can be shared and accessed by net users. This chapter discusses the implications that government control over information can have for the effects of social media on corruption. It suggests that freedom on the net and the anonymity of net users must be protected if the effects of social media on corruption are to be fully realized.*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest advantages of the Internet is to disseminate information, and social media has played an instrumental role in facilitating the spread of information. The reason is simple: social media platforms cannot only be used to disseminate new, user-generated information but can also be used to spread the information that originally appeared elsewhere. A significant amount of the content shared on social media platforms originates elsewhere on the Internet and even off-Internet. People routinely share links to online news articles, blog posts, pictures, and audio and video clips from radios, televisions, and several Internet source as well as photos and audio and video clips recorded by themselves using mobile phones or other electronic devices, and even pages from printed books, leaflets, and newspapers. Social media, thus, enables individuals to share information in a quick and cheap manner that was never possible before, to an audience that was never so big and diverse, and in a way that no one could have imagined a decade or so ago!

Since the primary objective of social media is to facilitate the communication and interaction between users and allowing them to edit and share content, social media platforms are designed to facilitate the exchange of information, even when users are geographically separated (Tepper, 2003; Porter, 2008). Social media platforms are, thus, intended to be dialogue platforms as opposed to traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television, which serves as a broadcast platform (Porter, 2008). The new information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as computer, Internet, mobile phones, social media platforms such as Facebook, Google Plus, and Twitter, and numerous applications that are used for communication have an important advantage over radio and television: While radio and television can be used for only one-way communication, the new ICTs allow for a two-way and even multi-way communication (Diamond, 2010). Many Internet users rely on social media platforms to communicate–sharing photos and videos, links to news and other stories, sharing their status updates–with their friends, family members, and a growing network of contacts (Madden, 2010). The popularity of and the reliance of Internet users on social media for communication have been increasing rapidly over time as reflected by the impressive growth in the number of social media users in recent years among both teens and adults in the United States (Madden, 2010; Lenhart, 2015). Worldwide, the number of Facebook users has increased massively in the last decade – from 1 million in 2004 to 1230 million by the end of 2013 (The Guardian, 2014). According to Statista, one of the world's leading statistics database, the total number of social media users increased by more than 230 percent in past 5 years – from under 1 billion in 2010 to 2.34 billion in 2015 (Statista, 2016). It is then not surprising that the exponential growth of social media users, not only in developed but also in developing and underdeveloped world, has drawn the attention of the academics. As a result, a significant body of research that evaluates whether social media (a form of the new ICT) can have causal effects on democratic, economic, and political outcomes[1] has emerged.

There are obvious advantages of such technologies that can facilitate and quicken the exchange of information. By allowing people to anonymously share their ideas and beliefs on multiple online platforms such as webpages, chat rooms, bulletin boards, blogs (Salbu, 2001), and, more recently social media websites, the ICTs augment the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression. The new ICTs enable the "citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom" (Diamond, 2010). Therefore, in many cases, the governments, especially (but not only) autocratic regimes, may feel the need for controlling certain types of information such as those related to political and bureaucratic corruption, police brutality, and judicial failures. Countries such as China, Malaysia, and Iran have been censoring information related to corruption, human rights violations, and policy brutality by controlling or even owning the print and broadcast media (Freedom House, 2009a). For example, in Malaysia, the government had a clear dominance over print and broadcast media through direct ownership and monopoly practices (Freedom House, 2009b). The 2009 Freedom of the Press Report documents that all of the 11 dominant national daily newspapers were owned by either the ruling coalition or individuals closely associated with the government. The report further points out that the state-owned Radio Television Malaysia operated a large number of radio stations along with two television channels (providing the government substantial control over the diffusion of information).

Indeed, the new ICTs have been recognized to be playing an instrumental role in promoting transparency and accountability and acting as deterrents for human rights violations and the abuses of democratic rights of the citizens (Diamond, 2010). The advent of the Internet and, more recently, social media has expanded the audience to which information can be shared and therefore has made controlling the diffusion of information much more difficult (Jha & Sarangi, 2014). The Internet and social media not only make

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