

On the mobilizing role of social media in revolutions: a game-theoretic approach

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Abstract

A distinctive feature of recent revolutions was the key role of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube). We study the role of social media in mobilization. In a simple model we assume that while social media allow to observe all previous decisions, mass media only give aggregate information about the state of a revolt. We show that when individuals' willingness to revolt is publicly known, then both sorts of media foster a successful revolution. However, when willingness to revolt is private information, only social media ensure that a revolt succeeds, with mass media multiple outcomes are possible. This suggests that social media enhance the likelihood that a revolution triumphs more than traditional mass media.

Keywords: social media, mass media, revolution, coordination game, sequential games

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