

Social Media Mobilization and Political Activism in Egypt

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Abstract

The potential of advancing social computer-mediated technologies lies in their capacity to engage people in collaborative endeavors, and in encouraging new ways of organizing information. Social media has changed the face of mass communication as a whole, giving it the aptitude to create an effective public sphere that enhances civic responsibility and political activism. Social media is increasingly recognized as a promising tool to change the formula of disseminating and utilizing information, through supporting the speed of information transmission and the level of content creation. This paper examines the history of Social media and its progression, focusing on Social Networking Sites (SNS), discussing fundamental changes and developments, and exploring SNS's role as instruments for political communication to mobilize and orchestrate socio-political demonstrations.

Keywords: Social media; Cyber-culture; Political activism; Democracy

Introduction

At the end of the 1990s and with the early beginning of the 2000s, a Wireless World of communication was presented, giving media a whole new dimension and restructuring the stakeholders' interactions. Today, reviving Marshall McLuhan's famous foresight of global village ecosystem, the world is operating wirelessly. Audience in today's cyberworld are able to receive content, information, movies, music and pictures, that can be accessed anywhere using wireless web-based technologies [1]. After the adaptation of the first web generation of internet communication, a new generation emerged as a natural evolution to web 1.0: Web 2.0, social media and new media are all synonym to the second generation of the internet and web-based technologies, depicted by the more interactive and dynamic way users cooperate online compared to the initial phases of the internet. This novel structure of Media has become omnipresent and includes numerous forms that were once

unimaginable [2]. Scholars have debated the role of new media tools, going towards their replacement of traditional - also known as legacy media-, or will these novel means of communication exist concurrent with legacy media in harmony.

Thanks to new media, innovative tools of communication have been reinvented. New media tools and emerging technologies have redefined the performance and functionality of social and cultural contexts, including political activism. Today, the prime tool for social interaction and engagement is Social Networking Site (SNS) like Facebook, Myspace, Twitter. These social platforms of communication have reshaped the traditional relationship between users and political authority, making it easier for the ostensibly powerless to engage and mobilize through collaboration, coordination, and the voicing of their opinions and demands. Today activists are defined by their tools as opposed to previous times when they were outlined by their causes.

Social media is renowned as a promising tool to change the formula of disseminating and utilizing information, through enhancing the speed of information transmission and the level of content creation [3]. The advances of new media, alongside the contributions of social media such as blogs, social networking sites (SNS) have, in a way, limited the performance and effects of traditional media. The potential of new media lies in their ability to connect and engage people in the social activity of interest, offering means of organizing information and efforts. This paper explains the history of Social media and its progression, focusing on Social Networking Sites (SNS), discussing key changes and developments, and exploring SNS's role as instruments for political communication to mobilize and orchestrate socio-political demonstrations.

Historical background

Origin of the internet goes back to 1834, starting with mathematician Charles Babbage, who invented an "analytical engine", able to perform calculations and store data [4]. Babbage's invention, followed by numerous technologies and innovations, constructed an infrastructure for the internet to operate. In the last few decades, computer technology and telecommunications have converged, blurring the line between that differentiate between these two environments,

and mixing their collaborative capacity and content creation potentials. This merging of instant, interactive communications and rapid data processing rapidly reformed the world's cyber culture, economy, politics, as well as users' lives.

The technological information revolution created new opportunities, brought together the modern concept of the public sphere, and even elicited new realities. The novel computer-mediated technologies offered access -with little or no filter- to the exchange of information and opinions. They have indisputably contributed to the creation of increasingly interconnected international societies. One of the most prominent technologies of today's world is social networking sites (SNS), which have become mainstream even in cultures that seem relatively underdeveloped, as now nearly a third of the world has endless access to them.

In the Arab region, the advent of the Internet and computer-mediated technologies brought with it hopes of democratic transformation. Given the solid grip of authority exerted by the authoritarian regimes found in the region, political communication, civil society groups and activists resorted to social media and SNSs as an efficient tool for political communication to compose statements, and to distribute anonymous political messages to targeted audiences – particularly when targeting or initialized by youth- when aiming to mobilize supporters for political activism movements.

Social media evolution

Social media exists in various forms: Text which could be used to convey and express opinions; Audio used to create podcasts for users to download. Wikis which users to create, edit and share information about just about anything; Video-sharing sites that allow users to upload and share personal or professional videos with other users; Photo-sharing websites allow users to upload pictures and images to their personal account which can then be viewed by web users all over the world [5]; News aggregation websites provide a list of the latest news stories published by users from a range of websites; Social bookmarking are sites that admit users to publicly bookmark web pages they believe are to be valuable and interesting to share with other users within the online community.

Other social media tools also include: online gaming platforms, weblogs or commonly known as blogs, and finally Social networking Sites (SNS), which enable users to construct a personal profile through which they are able to engage, discuss and share information with other users of their online community, usually friends or family members on their own network; most prominent SNS to this day, is Facebook.

According to media scholars Boyd and Ellison, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) formulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the

system. The nature of these connections may vary from site to site. Some sites are designed with specific ethnic, religious, gendered, or political orientation, or other identity-driven categories in mind. There are even SNSs dedicated for dogs and cats. Since their establishment, social network sites (SNSs) have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities [6].

SNS is an integral part of media consumption process within a modern society. The first practice of user interactivity can be traced back to Internet Chat Query (ICQ), developed in mid-90s, as the first instant messaging program for personal computers. Dating sites are considered by some as the first social networks, as the first dating site appeared almost as soon as people went online. Online forums also played a large part in social web/media evolution. Launched in 1997, Six Degrees is considered the first social networking site, due to the fact that it was the first website to allow users to create online personal profiles. Furthermore, Six Degrees enabled users to connect with friends in novel interactive means. Between 1997 and 2001, AsianAvenue and BlackPlanet followed SixDegrees' launch. These SNSs allowed users to create professional, personal and dating profiles. Later in 1999, LiveJournal was developed, adding the option of "following" users among networks, as well as updating blogs.

Literature Review

Social networking sites and political activism

SNSs have a vital role in shaping the political landscape in Web 2.0. A study conducted in the United States showed that more than a quarter of US voters, sample consisted of those who are younger than age 30 (including 37% of those aged 18-24). Sample's responses implied that SNS are the main source of news with regards to political campaigns. Political figures and entities alike, are now pursuing an online presence. For example, in 2009, Barack Obama announced that the White House will be joining both Twitter and Facebook, as a step towards an initiative "to reform the government so that it is more efficient, more transparent, and more creative."

President Barack Obama's account acquired 1.5 million friends on Facebook during his US presidential election campaign [7]. Obama's administration also announced the establishment of a "New Media Office" with the goal of promoting communication, transparency, and participation online [8]. Consequently, SNS are now used as vital elements in any political practice. As for SNSs political mobilization in the Arab world, Facebook page "Revolution Day" in Egypt, presents a list of demands for Mubarak's nearly 30-year-old administration, ranging from raising the minimum wage to limiting presidential terms.

Facebook is the third biggest "country" on Earth in terms of population, and if things keep going as they are, it will soon have more users than India has people [3]. Launched in 2004,

Facebook is considered the most popular SNS worldwide. Beside its popularity among internet users globally, Facebook is also famous in enabling voices for political deliberation and political interaction. Due to the nature of Facebook and its design, it gives space for an explicit political nature among social networks as it provides a clear reference to the user's political views as part of their profiles.

Technologies of freedom

In 2000, Edmund Ghareeb anticipated the continuing transformation of technology is likely to have a profound political implication for the world in general, and for the Middle East in particular. Ghareeb's anticipation emerged from the fact that new technologies offer communication capacity to a much larger number of people. Novel web-based technologies are revolutionizing how people receive and consume information. The so-called 'Communications Revolution' embraces a variety of new and evolving technologies, several of which bear political implications. Ghareeb believes that the information revolution is, to some extent, a product of the phenomenon of economic globalization, as well as an agent for its spread. According to Ghareeb, we have been witnessing the impact of new media explosion. "Internet and intranet services, voice mail, satellite television, cell phones, photos, audio, and video recording. Films and text can move across borders through the use of telephone lines, overcoming time zone restraints" [9].

This omnipresent revolution of computer-mediated technologies and SNSs have reformed the way youth utilize their online platform of self-expression. These platforms are increasingly proving their catalytic effect on far-reaching social and political reforms. In 2011, the Dubai School of Government (DSG) [10] discussed: "Youth, Social Media and Political Activism in the Arab World," focusing on the role of social media in employing "people power". Panelists elucidated how SNSs alongside social media tools, have been utilized for motivating, mobilizing and organizing protests. Social media is believed to be a powerful tool that offers a voice to those with no platforms to express political views in public. A report by DSG indicated that the total number of Facebook users in the Arab world increased annually reaching by 78 percent during 2010, from 11.9 million in January 2010 to 21.3 million by December 2010, reaching according to the internet World Stats more than 116 million users in the Middle East region alone [11].

The report added that countries had witnessed an increase in youth's participation on social media platforms. For example, Tunisia had an expansion in the number of Facebook users during the first two weeks of January 2011, coupled with users' change in objectives from social to primarily political. DSG Fellow Fadi Salem noted that "Arab youth had maximized their reach in an unprecedented manner through information technology, bringing radical changes in their societies and resolving real social and political challenges." A critical mass of young users, who mostly preferred social networks merely as platforms for alternative media, has now begun to utilize them for organizing social and civil movements in several Arab

countries. For these youth, there is no more a boundary between 'reality', and 'perception.'" (Youth, Social Media and Political Activism in the Arab World).

This adaptation of modern technology is considered as the third revolution to be witnessed in the history of global communication [9]. In the Arab world, the information revolution has transformed the media interaction and user-media relationship. Novel social connecting technologies-SNSs- have changed numerous facets of communication and authority vs. citizen's relationship, the most important of which has been the political discourse. The spread of pan-Arab newspapers, followed by the growth of independent satellite television networks, and then the introduction of new technologies (especially the Internet), has led to the emergence of a new type of political debate that transcends national boundaries. Since social media has grown in popularity and become mainstream, it has been faced with growing controversy and criticism. The main criticisms seem to fall under the same umbrella of social media prompting privacy and security concerns. However, among many sites, there is a growing trend to bolster the privacy policies and make users feel more secure.

Generally speaking, two of the most valuable aspects of social media are its ability to make social organization simpler and more effective and to increase government accountability. In Egypt, social media used by the protestors did not only allow individuals with common political ideas to come together, but it also provided a medium to plan concrete actions. Additionally, social media increases government transparency because no longer can the global audience be kept in the dark about what is going on in other countries. There are numerous interconnected individuals using social media and creating a transnational network armed with information [12].

According to social media guru: Clay Shirky, social media allows groups of people to know what others-within the same country or community- are thinking; and that is how political change transpires. Shirky explains that this notion of collectivity lies at the heart of public sphere. He adds that governments are not fearful of individuals getting access to new information; they are afraid of synchronized groups, and that's where political change happens. Shirky believes that social media has an effect on the political discourse of countries, and that social media's empowering tools are the end result of such process, rather than a replacement for the long process. Moreover, social media's political influence is in its sanctioning of people who are discontent with their government, to connect on the basis of shared feelings, and mobilize to act. The Egyptian political scientist Amr Hamzawy reaffirms the notion that only by stating you are against Mubarak, you automatically get support from similar people, which could have been the only spark needed for the Egyptian revolution to succeed.

Examples of social media tools' political activism

Within the Arab world, the merging of Political dissent with social media commenced with the blogosphere. Arab bloggers and users carry out the role of grassroots reporters and fact-checkers. They offer a variety of diary-style reporting, photographs, videos and intense scrutiny of events disseminated through traditional media. With social media gaining prominence, the new media's amateurs and practitioners became shapers of events rather than mere commentators. In authoritarian regime states like Egypt, Tunisia, and Iran, youth have been utilizing Facebook as a mean of communication leading to a virtual public sphere. Moreover, Arab youth use it to sustain their psychological wellbeing as a space to be free of constraints. A 22-year-old blogger and avid Facebook user explain: "It's such a release to go on Facebook. I feel so liberated knowing there's a place I can send my thoughts and academics of a pre-digital age" [13].

From the rise of President Obama to the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, SNSs (Facebook and Twitter in particular) became key conduits for news, information and commentary that united grassroots movements to challenge governments. In 2008, Obama's effective run for the White House was backed by his campaign's extensive use of social networking. Social media marketing expert, Andy Smith, who co-wrote "The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change," elaborated that Twitter-the San Francisco micro-blogging service with more than 175 million members- played a key role in spreading news of a 2009 post-election protest in Iran. Besides being a force in recent anti-government uprisings in Tunisia, the most dramatic use of social media by anti-government demonstrators was seen in the Egyptian revolution [13].

History witnessed numerous examples of the competences of modern communications in the political sphere: In 2004, demonstrations organized by text messaging led to escalated cataclysm in Spain, and eventually led to the ousting of the Spanish Prime Minister, José María Aznar, as a response for the bombings on Basque separatists in Madrid. Another example took place in 2006, when street protests broke in Belarus against President Aleksandr Lukashenko were arranged partially by e-mail. Moreover, during the June 2009 uprising (the Green Movement) in Iran, activists used every possible technological coordinating tool to protest the miscount of votes for Mir Hossein Mousavi. Likewise, the Red Shirt uprising in Thailand in 2010, involved technology-savvy protesters occupying downtown Bangkok via social networking mobilization.

Another incident highlighting the power of social networking is the impeachment trial of the President of the Philippines, Joseph Estrada, on January 17, 2001, during which loyalists in the Philippine Congress voted to set aside key evidence against him. Concerned that their corrupt president might be let off the hook, a protest was arranged by forwarded text messages reading: "Go 2 EDSA. Wear blk"; the crowd quickly mobilized, and in the following days, over a million

people arrived. Nearly seven million text messages were sent that week; This instance highlights the public's ability to coordinate mass protests in little time. Eventually they succeeded and by January 20, Estrada was ousted. This event marked the first potential and power of social media. Estrada himself blamed "the text-messaging generation" for his downfall.

Western communication systems support the notion that SNS -especially Twitter and Facebook- constitute catalysts for revolution in modern era. Some scholars even called the 2009 Iranian protests the "Twitter Revolution," in addition to that, Twitter was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Mark Pfeifle, a former national-security adviser, later wrote: "Without Twitter, the people of Iran would not have felt empowered and confident to stand up for freedom and democracy." The bizarreness in this evolves from the fact that in June 2009, the entire country of Iran only had 19,235 Twitter users, according to statistics assembled by Sysomos. Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen have a combined total of 14,642 Twitter users. That is a small number compared to a major public university than Twitter users in these three countries combined. Nevertheless, Facebook is relatively more widely used throughout the world since its penetration in Egypt was 4.58% as of July 2010, reaching 34.6% penetration rate in 2017 [11].

The Egyptian revolution in 2011, was not the first encounter in the world of digital web-based mobilization. Various political uprising has utilized the cyberspace as their platform. In Egypt, the April 6 movement has provided a structure for a new generation of Egyptians to assemble virtually and communicate freely about their grievances. Samer Shehata, an assistant professor of Arab politics at Georgetown University, believes it is not surprising that Egyptian youth have chosen to convey their political frustration towards a channel that does not belong to the Egyptian political ecosystem.

"The state of the opposition in Egypt is so pathetic that existing parties have lost all credibility. Nora Younis a political activist described April 6 strike as a practice session for the new generation. "It's a rehearsal for a bigger thing, now we are just testing the power of each other", she said [13]. The April 6 movement created new opportunities for activists to organize, demonstrate and create coalition of socialist, leftist and Islamist groups emerged called Kefaya. They concentrated on actions and discarded philosophical discussion. They were united on one issue: that Hosni Mubarak should not be allowed to transfer power to his son Gamal. Kefaya's activities were conveyed through blogs as they were largely ignored by the state-run media [14].

Ethan Zuckerman a research fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, thinks the April 6 movement exhibits what he called the "cute-cat theory of digital activism". Zuckerman believes this digital type of activism was made possible by the web-based tools, like proxy servers, which created specifically for activists to use away from government's control. Protesters thrive on sites like Facebook that are used primarily for more mundane purposes to express their political activism. Zuckerman exemplifies why the government will not block these sites for their peace of mind:

“The government can’t simply shut down Facebook because doing so would alert a large group of people who they can’t afford to radicalize. Undemocratic regimes can’t block political Facebook groups without blocking all the “American Idol” fans and cat lovers as well” [13].

For more than 30 years, there has been an enormous bureaucracy in Egypt, which in-turn created a challenging living condition. The enduring difficulties and changes in the social environment, made it difficult for anyone less than 30 years of age to be employed. Social media presented a tool of liberation via Facebook and Twitter. The educated, yet unemployed class, had access to computers and like other people within their age group, they communicated through social media, texting, and e-mail. It was in these social forums and discussions that they vented their growing anger about the injustice of Mubarak’s regime. Social media became their platform, where they could speak out and find supporters. Wael Nawara, a 47-year-old activist, commented on the mobilization found on Facebook “In general, there’s this kind of apathy, a sense that there is nothing we can do to change the situation. But with Facebook you realize there are others who think alike and share the same ideals” [13].

Facebook Revolution

The revolution in Egypt that started on January 25 - occasionally referred to as- the “Facebook Revolution” has gained publicity amongst Egyptians due to social media tools like Facebook and twitter. The revolution came about a Facebook page called “We Are All Khaled Said” (named for the young 28-year-old techie and businessman; who in 2010, was dragged out of an Internet cafe and murdered by Egyptian police). Wael Ghonim was the creator of the page, Ghonim was -at the time- a Google executive who employed his business and social skills to construct a Facebook protest based on the slogan “We Are All Khaled Said”.

Ghonim’s campaign attracted 473,000 online supporters, a notable number considering the size of Egyptian internet users at the time. The revolution thrived when people found supporters who shared the same enthusiasm and political stand. The rest of the Egyptian population joined the flow when they had nothing more to lose, given the cruel conditions they had to endure. When a critical mass of protesters was gathered, it was guaranteed that the army forces, and the police alike, will use force to break the advancing protests. Reluctant to open fire, army forces neutral stand gave courage and confident to other walks of society - including older Egyptians- to join the protests. Each day the news of what the government had done would spread through viral networks of social and mobile communications.

The Egyptian authorities responded by disabling the single connecting network of these grass-roots efforts, they disconnected the Internet followed by cell-phone connectivity and communication. Conversely, technology-minded protesters quickly began developing methods to dodge the obstacles executed by the Egyptian government. Some of the efforts suggested by the Egyptian activists were messages

which provided instructions on how to dial up a phone number as to be able to connect to the Internet, other messages offered means of bypassing government surveillance. When domestic Internet connections were completely shut down, such updates were sent from Egyptians living abroad or from other Arab social network users outside of Egypt, helping independent media get the news out on television and newspapers (Egypt: ‘Social Network Revolt’ with new twists, 2011).

Simultaneously, Twitter has been used to organize the ‘on the ground’ movement for the protesters, using tweets calling on Egyptians to assemble in certain places at specific times and giving up-to-date advice on which roads in cities to take, and which to avoid. Social media were used to show outsiders precisely what was happening on the ground, plan and arrange protests and the governmental and military response to the protesters. Eventually, thanks to the spark carried out via social media and the persistence of the Egyptian protesters for 18 days, Mubarak has turned power over to the Military Council and stepped down [2].

According to The New York Times, Twitter and Facebook have both played a central role in propagating the protests. Egypt has provided illuminating examples of the role social media can play in organizing and carrying out mass protests. Mohammed Jamjoom, CNN correspondent, believes that “In the case of Egypt, it played a critical factor in getting out the word...We can see that these sites were used to get the word out about how to bypass checkpoints, how to get across bridges, how to get to places where people wanted to demonstrate.” Jamjoom added that whether social media have helped or hindered protesters in Egypt, the events of the past week there have underscored the fact that both pro- and anti-government activists throughout the Middle East are making the most of social networking tools to organize and promote their causes in real-time to mass audiences.

Social media and social ties

SNSs still have their share of criticism. However, critics are trying to answer new problems with old solutions. Recently, in light of the political movements occurring in the Middle East, the argument has been fierce. Thomas Brown believes that with the help of SNSs, a dictatorship in Egypt was toppled. However, without the stamina and determination of the Egyptian people, a revolution could never have been achieved. As noted by Jim Clancy on CNN, “The biggest demonstrations in all of this were launched in the day when there wasn’t any Internet. There wasn’t any Twitter. There wasn’t any Facebook.” The result of these developments is yet to be seen; whether they succeed or fail, credit should be given to the people, not the technology [14].

In a CNN interview, Ghonim said, “This revolution started online, it started on Facebook; I always said that if you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet” [12]. Web-based technologies help in liberating oppresses societies. However, a question to be raised- given this notion of liberation- is, will the internet and web-based technologies serve the people as opposed to hierarchal authorities? Another inquiry is, will

these technologies enhance calls for freedom of speech, or will it be censored as has been the case with traditional media platforms. Still the most renowned critique to social media's political activism is Malcolm Gladwell.

Gladwell's argument in the *New Yorker* was an attack on the prevalent idea that online social networks represent the future of campaigning and protest within an authoritarian regime. Gladwell, media critique and author, argued that online social networks with their large proportion of superficial or marginal relationships characterized by "low-intensity" emotional bonds, can't serve to catalyze real confrontation with the forces of injustice. Gladwell explained that SNSs are only suitable for low-engagement activism like the kind of "click like to save the whales, which doesn't get much done" [15]. Gladwell claimed that activism was based on the strength of intimate friendships, shared experience, and directed by hierarchical power could never have arisen from the weak ties and horizontal associations that characterize online 'friends' and 'followers' [13].

On the other hand, Clay Shirky, a believer in SNSs harnessing power and political public sphere, suggested that Gladwell's principle response was bewildering. Shirky adds that danger requires political activists to be strongly committed to each other, not just to the cause. Shirky asserted that Gladwell referred to strong and weak ties, networks, and how they relate to each other in protest movements and seemed "to have committed himself to the idea that social networks are useless for spreading the 'fever,' or recruiting those who had caught the 'fever'". Shirky adds that the risk-free kinds of relationship that technology promotes are the antithesis of genuine complex human interaction. Shirky said that Gladwell seemed to be inverting the wisdom of a social theorist from a previous age: the message is not only about the medium [16].

Communication tools during the Cold War did not cause governments to collapse, but they facilitated ways for the people to win back power from the state when possible [17]. He emphasizes the political importance of conversation over the initial information dissemination effect: "Opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues. It is in this second, social step that political opinions are formed." This is the step in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular, can make a difference [18].

As with the printing press, the Internet does not just spread media consumption but media production as well. It allows people to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views [19]. Shirky's argument was that using social media as a tool for inspiring political action is not merely a liberating outlet for the oppressed yet digitally-empowered masses, but rather an applicable device for invoking widespread and effective popular action. Then the Tunisian uprising and Egyptian January 25th Revolution provided a strong empirical evidence for a significant positive correlation between the use of social media and progressive political action in the form of major, powerful grassroots rebels.

In *The Net Delusion*, journalist and social commentator Evgeny Morozov present the most prominent book-length argument opposing the notion that the Internet is a force for liberation. He refutes what he calls "cyber-utopianism," which he defines as "a naive belief in the emancipator nature of online communication" [20]. However, Morozov was born in Belarus, one of the world's most repressive governments. He adopts an attacking tone directed at Internet optimists concerning the Green Movement in Iran, explaining that as the revolt spread, Iranian exiles aided and publicized the movement from abroad by using new media, particularly YouTube and Twitter.

A previously scheduled suspension of service by Twitter was to take place during the Iranian protests. The Obama administration's State Department asked the company to postpone the suspension, and then it publicized its request, apparently to give heart to the protesters. Morozov concludes that this single diplomatic act by the United States administration has triggered a worldwide Internet panic and politicized all online activity, giving it a revolutionary spirit and threatening to tighten online spaces and opportunities that were previously unregulated. He concluded was saying that social media have been overestimated as tools for political liberation [21].

In a post entitled "Does Egypt need Twitter?" Gladwell argues that social media is not necessary for revolutions and that uprisings happened long before the world had the internet. On the other hand, Shirky argues that revolt is a natural consequence of injustice and that social media is not an element to rebellion. Undeniably, the rebellion of the oppressed is inevitable, aside from the availability of social media tools, but it is not a question of necessity, but one of effect. To utilize Gladwell's term, the "tipping point" explaining a form of dominos effect, the Arab uprising would have been disconnected and in vain, if social media tools were missing from the context [21].

Egyptian blogger Hani Morsi's writings have also tackled technology-driven activism and the role social media plays in providing incremental societal change. Hani's core argument focuses on the long-term effects of social media. Rather than looking at it as a liberating outlet for the oppressed. He stresses its value in making an impossible popular political discourse possible. He talks about the role social media played in reviving a dormant public consciousness into a dynamic social conversation in Egypt. He refutes the assumption that social media's influence has peaked before the 18 days in which Mubarak's regime was brought down. Morsi deems that it is because of what has been simmering under the surface of the Egyptian political scene for a while particularly since the Presidential "elections" of 2005.

Finally, Hani notes that the instigators of the Egyptian riots are not particularly representative of the vast majority of Egyptians. These are young, educated, tech-savvy, upper-middle class individuals. They are not oppressed masses, but rather speak for all of Egypt. They do this by taking the war for reform to their virtual turf, away from the regime's clamp

down on political action, and then funneling it back to the physical world in the form of a mighty wave of revolt.

Conclusion

“Social media have become public space of the twenty-first century,” said Hillary Clinton commenting on the revolutions and political movements that were taking place in the Middle East. Globally, social media have become a vital element in the lives of web-based technology’s users. Whether it’s something as simple as looking up reviews of movies to forming major life decisions like a future of a country, social media seems to have the answer. Chapman believed that social media is sure to keep evolving in the coming years, with an optimistic view for the Internet’s potential to alter global politics; Jared Cohen and Eric Schmidt the chairman of Google, have offered perhaps the most persuasive forecast.

In “The Digital Disruption: Connectivity and the Diffusion of Power” essay which was published shortly before the historic and unexpected Tunisian revolution, it was disputed that the “advent and power of connection technologies would make the twenty-first century all about surprises. An era when the power of the individual and the group grows daily,” The political effects will include a notable increase in the pace of change itself, a world of volatility, speed, and surprise. Cohen and Schmidt, believe that the Internet presents novel communication structures that will alter global politics and political communication ecosystem alike, in ways that earlier communications technologies fell short.

In the Middle East and most recently in Egypt, Facebook has become a vital platform for dissent in countries. Nevertheless, political and social movements belong to people and not to communication tools and technologies (Middle East Institute, 2000). Facebook, like cell phones, the internet, and Twitter is not predisposed to any particular ideology nor a political orientation. These social networks represent what users make of them. Facebook is no more responsible for Egypt’s revolution than Gutenberg’s printing press was responsible for the Protestant Reformation in the fifteenth century. But it is valid to say that neither the reformation nor the pro-democracy rights’ movements sweeping Tunisia, Egypt, Iran, and much of the region would have come about without these new tools. Around the globe, far beyond Egypt and Tunisia, the world is witnessing a significant change in digital literacy, which has begun with the age of Generation 2.0 [3].

Numerous media experts believe in the capabilities of social media and in their power to alter futures. As Jeff Jarvis- an associate professor and director of the interactive journalism program at the City University- describes Social Media with a focus to SNS “I believe they are the Gutenberg Press of the Middle East.” In a realistic centralized regime where your voice is unspoken, and there is a risk of announcing it, participating in online social media encourages bridging social human resources by expanding the scope of connections. Dick Costello, who holds the position of CEO of Twitter, also believes that SNS were utilized were they were needed the most: in the suppressive countries of the Middle East.

Social media -indisputably- have enabled and gave power/ voice to the powerless. They have enabled a new and genuine form of connectivity that was never witnessed before. Like any technology, it emanates responsibility and consequences to users’ actions. Within the Arab world, we have endorsed episodes of interactivity and pursue of democracy, some have failed, some won and other are still fighting; web-based technologies and especially social media has a focal role in battles for democracy as it enables users to connect, debate, mobilize their efforts and most importantly, voice out their opinions which are not allowed nor tolerated within traditional and legacy media outlet. The future holds great potentials for social media platforms and activism, yet again as stated earlier, users’ need to pursue democracy with accountability and responsibility towards the greater good of the society.

Future Recommendations

Social media ecosystem has changed the roles and responsibilities of users, regimes, media tools, delivery of content, and opinion expressions. The correlation between social media platforms and opinion expression relating to controversial issues -like religious and political viewpoints- need a more comprehensive investigation. A further understanding of what constitutes a drive to express one’s understandings is necessary as well as what might act as chilling factors towards expressing a controversial political point of view. Future studies should investigate the relationship between mass medium, means of interactivity, and uses gratification concerning political expression.

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