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Samuel Cammer   4/17/2012

Tweeting Their Way to Freedom: An analysis of the role of internet technology in
the 2011 Egyptian Revolution

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Abstract

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It is somewhat unfathomable how far technology has come in the last 30 years. My
parents can still remember a time when they had only a handful of television
channels and when color television became popular. If the possibilities presented
by technology seemed endless then, imagine how those same people feel today
looking out upon the expanse of modern technology that has become integrated into
our daily lives. Many scholars and news reporters alike have lauded the Arab Spring,
specifically the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, as the 'Facebook revolution'
or the 'Twitter revolution.' While it is understood that these types of non-traditional
media have had a critical impact on the protests in North Africa, it is my contention
that their role has been overstated, insofar as social media has been credited with
powering the revolution. This central dilemma will act as the thesis and guiding
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Table of Contents

Samuel Cammer

2012

Tweeting their way to freedom

An examination of the role of Internet technology in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution

Introduction:

It is somewhat unfathomable how far technology has come in the last 30 years. My parents can still remember a time when they had only a handful of television channels and when color television became popular. If the possibilities presented by technology seemed endless then, imagine how those same people feel today looking out upon the expanse of modern technology that has become integrated into our daily lives. Cell phones, originally conceived as mobile telephones, are now small high-powered computers granting us access to the Internet and connecting us to an endless stream of information. Friends and family living at great distances can communicate instantaneously for little or no charge at all. The Internet, in my opinion, has changed the way we live our lives.

On a daily basis I communicate with friends on two continents and with people who I would rarely if ever see in normal face-to-face communication. The Internet, and subsequently social media, has helped create a network of people who share their lives, struggles, and triumphs. Therefore, it is essential that the study of any modern revolutions, specifically the protests seen in Egypt, be considered to have occurred in concert with technological advancement. Pamphlets and cassette tapes of past revolutions have been replaced with 140 character Tweets, and updates submitted through peoples individual profile pages. Information, once centralized and funneled through political and labor organizations, is now unfiltered. In today's world, anyone, with any point of view, is able to launch a facebook site or a twitter site to present information.

Egypt is a key modern example of where scholarship must marry an understanding of media and technology with history and social context. Only through a more complex optic can we begin to grasp the entirety of what happened in Egypt. Scholars, both old and new, often attempt to present their work through the guidance of a specific field of study, be it sociological or historical. My goal, with this work, is to demonstrate that we can only begin to understand the complexities of what happened in Egypt and understand the true intent of the protestors when we step back and evaluate Egypt through various lenses to hopefully arrive at a more unified theory. Therefore, I will attempt to provide in depth analysis of the individual tweets and the local interests they represented, as well as larger shifts in language, rhetorical frames, and historical context. It is only by stepping back and providing a well rounded image of Egypt that we can begin to conclude what role the advancement of technology, specifically of the Internet, Twitter, and Facebook, had in Egypt, and more broadly the Arab Spring.

Egypt experienced, or can be considered to be still experiencing, one of the greatest popular and urban movements in its history. 2011 marked the end of Hosni Mubarak's regime. Facing mounting international pressure and an ever growing group of protestors, Mubarak eventually succumbed to the pressure and resigned. Faced with a country in economic free fall and staggering unemployment, the protestors and current transitional military government are faced with an almost impossible task of rebuilding a nation. Yet, however complex the current political situation is in a post-Mubarak Egypt, what remains undeniable is that the protests ignited a pride in Egypt, a reborn national pride, that in many ways was a

product of complex local issues and a new ideological vernacular that together

revitalized and re-energized the long repressed people of Egypt. In order to

understand these local issues, and the revitalization of Egyptian nationalism, we

must first understand the geopolitical context under which these revolutions were

happening. Only once we have addressed these larger historical issues, can we

begin to make any claims regarding what role, if any, social media, specifically

Facebook, Twitter, and personal online blogs had on shaping the revolution.

The Internet, for many, has become glorified as the golden bullet that will

bring about the type of change of eras past. Powered by the Internet, Social Media

has engaged society in larger more open conversations about governance and

society as a whole. Free, or at least freer, media has been credited with encouraging

a more democratic world where freedom of the press becomes emblazoned as a

universal right. Yet the Internet, has not, at least yet, become that golden bullet, that

"guaranteed" solution that is so sought after.

Many scholars and news reporters alike have lauded the Arab Spring,

specifically the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, as the 'Facebook revolution'

or the 'Twitter revolution.' While it is understood that these types of non-traditional

media have had a critical impact on the protests in North Africa, it is my contention

that their role has been overstated, insofar as social media has been credited with

powering the revolution. This central dilemma will act as the thesis and guiding

principle for this work. I will highlight how Social Media is a tool – the most recent

in a long history of tools used by protestors to achieve their goals. Like many

technological advancements of the past, Social Media has reshaped how we engage in politics and reinvigorated a global discourse. Facebook and Twitter did not themselves cause revolution, but they did radically change how people communicate and how information is shared. It spawned an alteration in the way that people think about political activity and protest. These questions remains ever-present in eyes of those scholars who have begun to untangle the changing landscape of Egypt.

Regional Context

Mohamed Bouazizi, in response to his government's inability to care for its citizenry, lit himself aflame in Tunisia to protest the ill treatment faced by those trying to eke out a living in Tunisia. Bouazizi's actions are seen by many in the Arab World as the catalyst for the varied social and political movements that spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East.[1] Tunisia has become one case study in a wave of political unrest throughout the region, whereby popular discontent, a growing democratic ideology, and local issues culminated in the end of longstanding regimes in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.[2]

> Protests are nothing new to this region.

> "In Tunisia, protestors escalated calls for the restoration of the country's suspended constitution. Meanwhile, Egyptians rose in revolt as strikes across the country brought daily life to a halt and toppled the government. In Libya, provincial leaders worked

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[1] Blight, Garry. "Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests." The Guardian. 2012.
[2] Anderson, Lisa. "Demystifying the Arab Spring." *Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 90 (2011): 2-7.

feverishly to strengthen their newly independent republic. ... It was 1919"[3]

However, the Arab Spring, unlike protests of the past, is suddenly far more effective at causing regime change and gaining the critical mass necessary for sustained protest.

While protests in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt appeared the same on the surface, appealing to tenets of nationalism and dignity, they were in reality only able to take hold because of local circumstances that made this revitalization of nationalism and a demand for more democratic rule salient to the population.[4] In Libya for example, armed rebels in the east were only able to ignite protest because of tribal and regional "cleavages that beset the country for decades."[5] As one begins to read news coverage of these protests and revolts, it becomes clear that these local and regional issues sometimes become suppressed by both large multi national news organizations and those individuals reporting via Twitter and Facebook. In short, I will seek to provide a rational or optic through which to view the 2011 protests in Egypt. Regardless of whether you define the revolutions as a success, what I hope to demonstrate is that only by understanding specific local contexts can we hope to understand the protests in terms of its potential for nationalism, and understand what role Social Media had on the revolution in Egypt.

Organization of Thesis:

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[3] Ibid, 2.
[4] Ibid, 2.
[5] Ibid, 2.

This thesis begins by providing an evaluation of Nationalism. Looking at how nationalism has been co-opted to unite disparate peoples, I will seek to draw parallels between larger visions of nationalism and a specific moment of revitalized Egyptian nationalism. I will then continue to provide a critique of those who simply point to the Arab Spring as the Facebook revolution. While it is undeniable that Facebook and social media played a role in how information was shared, how messages were revised to evoke revolutionary frames and anti-Mubarak frames, Facebook and Twitter alone cannot be given credit for laying the foundation for the protests. If anything they were the most effective and widely used tools during the revolution, but they themselves did not cause the revolution. Furthermore to better understand how the events that unfolded in Egypt affect the Arab world and Africa as a whole, I will address the different frames presented by the protestors. Additionally I will examine the role religion plays in uniting a new Egypt. I will conclude by looking at how Social Media helped reshape local concerns to better fit with the larger ideological thrust being made by political organizers. To achieve these goals I will provide a literature review on Nationalism and Social Media, analyze selected tweets from individuals on the ground in Egypt, provide analogous case studies, and highlight how social media both had bolstering and undermining effects on the revolution in Egypt.

Egypt and Social Media

The revival or revitalization of an Egyptian nationalism arose in part because the Internet and subsequent Social Media programs reshaped how people

communicated and allowed for an Egyptian cohesion not seen since independence.

These outlets (Twitter, Facebook, and Personal Blogs) provided new ideas about

what was wrong with society, but they also changed who had access to these ideas.

The grievances presented were not wholly new; rather, they were longstanding

grievances that were now being shared and discussed by a rapidly expanding public

sphere, one with the education and desire necessary to maintain sustained

discussions about Egypt's future. A wider audience, engaged by Social Media, began

to participate in protests against the status quo in Egypt.

Suddenly, through taking familiar and longstanding grievances, and

reforming them to fit a more nationalistic discourse, Egypt was on the road towards

great change. At the peak of the protests these smaller local concerns were pushed

aside as demands for democracy and dignity rang out in Tahrir Square. These

longstanding grievances, these local issues, are the tinder that started a larger, and I

would contend, more ideological movement towards citizen governance. Frederick

Cooper, in his discussion on early post colonial Africa, describes a scenario whereby

nationalism was not so much rooted in the desire for a nation state, rather in social

equality. European's sought to develop the 'backwards' countries of Africa.

However, as Africa transitioned towards decolonization, "such claims were quickly

turned into counterclaims: by African trade unions asserting that if the African

worker is to produce according to a European model, he should be paid on a

European pay scale."[6] The protests in Egypt sought to address major social ills, as

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[6] Cooper, Frederick. *Africa since 1940 : The Past of the Present*, New Approaches to African History.

Mubarak, like long oppressed colonial Africans had devalued and debased the average citizen. During the most intense protests, suddenly, the individual ills that united Egypt took a back seat. People began demanding their dignity back; they claimed that all the small injustices perpetrated by the state were a systematic devaluation of the Egyptian people and Egyptian pride. Examining how local issues coalesced into a cohesive, seemingly singular revolutionary message, at certain moments during the protests, represents one of the most effective harnessing of Social Media to date. However, I will seek to place Social Media in its proper context, demonstrating both its unique role in the Egyptian protests, as well as demonstrating how Social Media and the Internet are only one case study in a long history of technological advancement supporting protests and subsequent political refiguring. While Social Media is critical to understanding the events as they transpired in Egypt, their role is often overstated. Egypt saw such mass mobilization because Egypt was primed for a change in the status quo and because so many more people were able to participate in the discourse of the future of the Egyptian nation.

Literature Review

A great many scholars provide useful tools to analyze the events that unfolded in Egypt. In this section I will seek to demonstrate not so much the historical context in which these authors first uncovered their theories; rather, I will focus on how their theories have been and may be applied to modern situations.

Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pg, 16.

While all the scholars who will be addressed in this section have provided insight into specific moments in history, it is only when we explore their impact as a collective on the modern political refiguring seen in Egypt that the longstanding impact of their work becomes apparent.

Nationalism:

> When it is achieved during a war of liberation the
> mobilization of the masses introduces the notion of
> common cause, national destiny, and collective history
> into every consciousness. - **Fanon**[7]

While Fanon's views on nationalism are often criticized for demanding absolute violence to overthrow the status quo, the understanding he displays of the human psyche in many ways hold true. For Fanon, violence against the oppressor is the only way for the colonizer to see or learn of his transgressions. Fanon, influenced by his experiences in Algeria, speaks about the debased colonized worker. Fanon notes that the worker, "reduced to the state of an animal" has been stripped of his or her dignity.[8] Yet, even as Fanon makes more radical claims, his thoughts on the role of the national consciousness are of critical importance to understanding the removal of Mubarak during the Egyptian crisis.

The progression towards a Universalist or potentially national consciousness, takes a prescribed path according to Fanon, one that may prove useful in evaluating Egypt. Fanon envisions that "over a long period of time the

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[7] Fanon, Frantz, and Richard Philcox. *The Wretched of the Earth / Frantz Fanon ; Translated from the French by Richard Philcox ; Introductions by Jean-Paul Sartre and Homi K. Bhabha*. New York: Grove Press, 2004.

[8] Ibid, 7.

colonized have devoted their energy to eliminating iniquities such as forced labor,

corporal punishment, unequal wages, and the restriction of political rights."[9] These

iniquities, not all together dissimilar to the experience of an Egyptian citizen under

Mubarak, demonstrate that "this fight for democracy against man's oppression

gradually emerges from a universalist, neoliberal confusion to arrive, sometimes

laboriously, at a demand for nationhood."[10] Yet, Fanon finds fault with the national

consciousness, fault I will contend is well warranted in the case of Egypt.   National

consciousness leaves behind a "crude, empty, fragile shell." Formed on the basis of a

common hatred, or dehumanization, national consciousness, while powerful for

joining people together, proves troublesome once the initial goals of revolution are

met and the task of rebuilding takes center stage. For Fanon, it all returns to

violence, which is why Fanon alone cannot explain the events in Egypt.

> It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual
> inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation
> is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.
> Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the
> past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much
> to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. –
> **Anderson**[11]

Benedict Anderson tackles nationalism from a completely different angle.

Rather than be concerned with the relationship between the oppressed and

oppressors, Anderson demonstrates what conditions were necessary for

nationalism to flourish.   Anderson believes that based on shared rituals such as

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[9] Ibid, 97.
[10] Ibid, 97.
[11] Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed ed. London ; New York: Verso, 2006.

reading the newspaper and the shared linguistic and vernacular past we form imagined communities where we believe that those individuals in our imagined community are, at all times, sharing some common outlook, some shared vision of the future, that they both strive for. Consequently, a bond forms between two people who have never spoken face to face and yet they know, through shared experience and history, that they share some commonalities.[12]

Print media transformed these imagined communities. Stories of solitary heroes immortalized as "'our young man'" were spread throughout Indonesia. This imago of 'our hero' came to be seen a young man who belongs to the collective body of readers of Indonesian, and thus, implicitly, an embryonic Indonesian 'imagined community.'"[13] The Indonesian example helps mark what is one of Anderson's key points. Anderson sees the explosion of print media, especially considering that in the "40-odd years between the publication of the Gutenberg Bible and the close of the fifteenth century, more than 20,000,000 printed volumes were produced in Europe; between 1500 and 1600, the number manufactured had reached between 150,000,000 and 200,000,000."[14] This explosion of printed material, both printed volumes and newspapers, serve to replace the ritual of morning prayer, which used to be the social glue that held society together.

Anderson believes that the rise of nationalism and these imagined communities could not have taken place had three key tenets of early cultures had

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, 32.
[14] Ibid, 33-34.

not lost some of their grip. The first of these ideas was that "a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth."[15] Anderson believes that it was a linguistic shift away from Latin and languages of the elite that helped create these powerful imagined communities. Second, the idea that societies were organized under powerful and god like monarchs or dynastic rulers became unpopular and fell out of favor. Finally, the disillusion between cosmology and history, whereas the "origins of the world and of men" were no longer essentially identical, primed society for the rise of print capitalism.[16]

Anderson remains an important consideration for Egypt, as the conditions necessary for the rise of print media parallels closely the rise of social media. Like the printing press, Social Media was a new technology through which strong yet imagined bonds formed. Yet, Anderson's initial question remains unanswered: How do so many choose to die for these inventions, how does it become part of the fabric of their being? Anderson chooses to remind us how "nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love."[17] This along with the idea that the nation itself (not necessarily its government) but the conception of the nation is 'interestless', and for that "for that reason, it can ask for sacrifices."[18] In all, Anderson remains useful during our consideration of Egypt, in large part because his outline for the rise of nationalism not only parallels the events in Egypt, but because it allows

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[15] Ibid, 36.
[16] Ibid, 36.
[17] Ibid, 141.
[18] Ibid, 144.

scholars the opportunity to rework and further Anderson's argument with a modern analogue.

Fanon and Anderson are only one sliver of the conceptually rich study of nationalism. Miller in 1995 provides a new imagining of nationalism that highlights the staying power of nationalism. Even if "nations are not real in the same way as volcanoes and elephants – that is having an existence independent of people's thoughts about them – it is still possible to conceive of a common public culture shared by members of a nation."[19] This review of nationalism also neglects to address the serious consequences of when nationalism misappropriated, a critique many scholars make of the Egyptian case which I will explore at a later point. Yet the answer to these questions, insofar as they relate to the Egyptian protests, will become clearer.

Media, Communication, Technology:

The Internet has changed the way the world communicates. Newspapers and printed media are becoming obsolete as we continue to transition into the digital age. Western leaders are "pining for something that has guaranteed effectiveness" in their mission to spread democracy.[20] While the USSR may have collapsed peacefully under the weight of "pop culture, blue jeans, and bubble gum"; in today's world, those same tenets no longer hold their same weight.[21] The more recent

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[19] Day, Graham, and Andrew Thompson. *Theorizing Nationalism*. Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
[20] Morozov, Evgeny. *The Net Delusion : The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. 1st ed. New York: Public Affairs, 2011. x,xi
[21] Ibid, x,xi.

policies of democratic intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that

a new tactic is required for peaceful and fast paced transitions towards

democracy.[22]

> In other words, let them tweet, and they will tweet their
> way to freedom. – **Morozov**[23]

Evgeny Morozov believes that we overlook the dark side of the Internet and

that this aforementioned ideal of tweeting our way to freedom has been overstated.

He, however, does not deny the power of the Internet, simply the belief that it has

been, or can be used for a sort of utopian good. For Morozov, the Internet is like

"Radio Free Europe on steroids."[24] The Internet is seen as a powerful and yet cheap

tool for disseminating information. Internet users are able to learn of the horrors of

their regimes "by turning to search engines like Google and by following their more

politically savvy friends on social networking sites."[25] Yet for Morozov, his

contention is not that the Internet cannot perform good actions; rather, Morozov

says that it is the very uninhibited nature of Internet communication that opens to

door to misuse. As much as social media can spread the tenets of democracy, it also

spreads extremist rhetoric and is used as a surveillance tool against dissidents.

Considering these facts, Morozov seeks to counter those who seek to present the

inevitability of revolution through the Internet.

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[22] Ibid, x,xi.
[23] Ibid, xii.
[24] Ibid, xii.
[25] Ibid, xii.

The Internet is only the current incarnation of how technology has shaped

revolutions. Morozov makes specific reference to the methods by which Ayatollah

Khomeini distributed audiocassette tapes during the Iranian revolution. The

Internet however, unlike the audiocassette tapes of the 1970's, has its own pitfalls.

In his chapter on 'Internet Freedoms and Their Consequences,' Morozov believes

that "rational politics doesn't fit a hundred forty characters."[26] The time has passed

where politicians and those intellectuals participating in political discourse are able

to spend time forming deep and careful responses. Citizens in many countries

demand that politicians react now almost instantaneously – the Internet now gives

us the ability to receive and respond to events in almost real time. Reporters now

often learn of breaking news, not from official channels, but from members of the

general public, who now, because of mobile Internet technology and cell phones, can

upload images to the web and send out alerts to friends, family, and their extended

social network.[27] The old adage that we are connected to everyone in the world by

six degrees of separation is now outdated. Recent analysis done by Facebook

demonstrates that in fact we are, on average, separated by 4.7 degrees.[28] If two

facebook members are selected at random from around the world, it has been

calculated that through only 4.7 intermediaries we can connect any two randomly

selected individuals on facebook.   Social spheres, once small and geographically

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[26] Ibid 266.
[27] Ibid, 266-273
[28] The old adage of 6 degrees of separation stated that you could connect yourself to anyone else in the world through only 6 other intermediaries. The revised numbers from facebook demonstrate that, at least on their site, take any two random individuals and it only takes 4.7 intermediaries to connect them, not the six of our pre-internet days.

defined, now span the globe as people unite behind singular causes. The world,

because of 'Social Media' is now a smaller place.

> The supposed 'newness' of social movements overstates their
> novelty, ignores their organizational forerunners and long-
> term historical cycles of cultural critique, confuses an early
> position in a cycle of protest with a new type of protest, and
> misinterprets contemporary phenomena as a qualitative shift
> in collective action – **Victoria Carty**[29]

Victoria Carty's *Wired and Mobilizing* attempts to analyze the conditions

necessary for collective action. Collective action, especially in Egypt, is the result,

not simply of a blind national consciousness or identity, but contingent on local

conditions necessary for protest to prosper. "By appealing to identity, social

movements motivate participants though intrinsic rewards such as self realization,

personal satisfaction, and providing a sense of group belonging."[30] This sense of

belonging is not a new concept, nor is it unique to the modern era of social media.

Carty claims that the 'newness' of the Internet and the movements it is believed to

have started neglects longstanding social critiques. She claims that these recent

protests are simply an early position in a cycle of protest with a new type of protest

– a type of protest fueled by social media. Finally, Carty appeals to theorists,

specifically Habermas. Years of media consolidation has served as a "corrosive

social force by denying citizens a voice in public affairs while at the same time

enhancing the power of corporate interests. The shift towards an Internet ready

and mobile equipped society has begun to challenge this social decay. The

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[29] Carty, Victoria. *Wired and Mobilizing : Social Movements, New Technology, and Electoral Politics.*
New York: Routledge, 2011.
[30] Ibid, 13.

revolutions in Egypt are demonstrative of a new way we are engaging in a global

discourse. Political participation is no longer reserved for the few, anyone can now

participate and share their point of view. This expansion of the social sphere, a key

tenet of Habermas, gives credibility to the idea that social media has expanded the

social sphere thereby engaging more people in protest.

Theory:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and
> make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way
> as to promote a particular problem definition. - **Entman**[31]

One of Robert Entman's main contentions is that frames "define" problems,

as well as demonstrate what the causal agent of that problem is. [32] [33] More simply,

the way in which an issue or an event is framed, in and of itself, can determine how

the audience will understand a problem. Frames highlight specific pieces of

information in a larger communication. This elevates specific pieces of a message to

salience and thus helps ensure that a higher percentage of those receiving the

message interpret it as the communicator intended.[34] What seems most important

for Entman is an understanding of how an existing belief can have an immense affect

on how we transmit and receive information in the various media formats. As such,

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[31] Entman, Robert M. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of
Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58, 52
[32] Ibid, 52.
[33] Frames can be understood as lens through which people present and understand events as they
unfold. Frames can align with dominant discourses, but can also be used to shift how people
understand events. Choices in language, context, and the way information is presented can guide a
captive audience towards a certertain interpretation, such as a revolutionary frame or in the case of
Egypt a resistance or anti-Mubarak frame.

[34] Entman, 52.

the political potential of framing is endless. Frames bring into focus certain aspects

of a political reality while obscuring others. This fact forces politicians, and political

entities, to compete in order to control the news media's frames.

> In the moment when a historical event passes under the
>
> sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal
>
> 'rules' by which language signifies. To put it
>
> paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it
>
> can become a communicative event. - **Hall**[35]

Stuart Hall provides one of the more useful analyses of mass communications

when considering the events that transpired in Egypt. Hall highlights the various

'moments' of communication, specifically addressing how events must first be

digested and reformed in order to be transmitted to the population. A close reading

of Hall's seminal work on 'Encoding and Decoding' outline these 'moments.' The

institutional and organizational conditions in a given situation define how a

message is encoded. An encoded message must then be transformed into some

symbolic form, a form easily distributed to others. Finally, this message must be

consumed by the reader/viewer who constructs his reality in part based on the

decisions made by the institution or those encoding the message.

The communication cycle/schematic proposed by Hall is useful as it

demonstrates highlights how 'receivers' of messages can interpret communication

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[35] Hall, Stuart. "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse." CCCS Stencilled Paper no.7, 1976.
    Pg, 129-132.

differently. A receiver may have a dominant (hegemonic) reading, a negotiated

reading, or an oppositional reading.[36] Receivers who ascribe to the dominant

reading fully share the encoder's belief system, and as such, usually interpret the

message as the encoder intends. Logically, negotiated and oppositional readers

resist part or all of the encoded message and the frames presented in the media.   In

conclusion, Hall demonstrates how social determinants of class as well as political

discourse can affect how all mass communications is interpreted as well as how it

can be harnessed for specific purposes.

> Man's characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not
> physical but moral; that is, social. He is governed not by a
> material environment brutally imposed on him, but by a
> conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he
> feels. Because the greater, better part of his existence
> transcends the body, he escapes the body's yoke, but is subject
> to that of society. - **Durkheim**[37]

Durkheim devotes a great deal of his work to the differentiation between

social cohesiveness in early societies and cohesiveness in modern society. In early

societies, Durkheim posits that both the lack of specialized tasks, along with the

production as a means of subsistence, allowed religion to take central importance as

a means of providing a collective consciousness.[38] Religion is the universal idea

though which a pre-industrial collective consciousness was formed. Members of

[36] **Dominant Hegemonic** – The prevailing or dominant discourse
Negotiated Reading – discourse participants who ascribe to multiple frames
Opposition Reading – discourse participants who ascribe to strictly oppositional frames to the dominant discourse.
[37] Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), French sociologist. Suicide, bk. 2, ch. 5, sct. 2 (1897, trans. 1951)
[38] Dowd, Tim. "Society and Culture." In *Emory Department of Sociology Core Class*, edited by Emory University: Emory University, 2011.

early societies have shared religious beliefs that help bind them towards common goals and help define what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior on society.[39] The power of the collective consciousness does not wane with time; however, what provides that cohesion does.

"Modern societies do not look much like primitive societies."[40] The division of labor makes social cohesion a vastly different dynamic whereby society relies on the "interdependence of many people performing dissimilar roles."[41] Today, our solidarity relies on the knowledge that without other members of society doing their part, our society would collapse. Production is no longer a means of survival or subsistence; as a modern society, we generate a surplus to trade, share, and sell to other members of society.

As religion's influence wanes in 'Modern Society,' the rituals we share, the way in which we commemorate and discuss shared events help provide social cohesiveness while allowing each individual to maintain their own shared beliefs. Commemoration is part of that social glue that holds us together, "it revivifies the most essential elements of the collective consciousness"[42] By understanding these rituals we can understand how modern societies share experiences and thus can translate these more essential Durkheimian principals to modern communication such as social media, which has shifted the way we commemorate, ritualize, and become a more cohesive society.

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

> The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the
> sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon
> claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the
> public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over
> the general rules governing. – **Habermas**

As stated before, Habermas concerns himself with the contraction of and expansion of the social sphere. Habermas argues that social spheres, as they contract, become more oppressive and a hindrance to democracy. Habermas defines the social sphere as an "uncoerced conversation oriented towards a pragmatic accord." [43] While I will later call into contention the conception that society is working towards an accord, uncoerced conversation tends to encourage democracy. Given Habermas' theory, there seems to exist a tension between government intervention in media and free media, a tension that defines one's ability to participate in the public sphere and discourse. Many scholars have attempted to further Habermas' approach and apply it to politics. Ancient rulers gained their legitimacy through lineages and a supposed anointment by god. This aura gained by ancient leaders is a fleeting conception when considering authority figures on the Internet. For today's Internet authority figures, "the Internet seems to discourage the endowment of individuals with inflated status."[44]

Historical Context:

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[43] Poster, Mark. "Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere." University of California Irvine (1995).

[44] Ibid.

Current Political Context

While Egypt has a rich and complex history dating back to the time of early human civilization, for the scope of this inquiry, our focus will be to explain how the choices made by modern Egyptian leaders, namely Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, helped bring about a set of social, political, and economic conditions that primed Egypt for a revolution. In present day Egypt moments of nationalism often makes nostalgic claims towards Egypt's rich past, but what is most relevant to this discussion is how the current political state of affairs came into being.

During Nasser's early years he proposed building a new society based on "self – sufficiency (kifayah) and justice."[45] In a postcolonial world, Nasser sought to inspire a people who only recently gained their independence. Egypt, after years of colonial rule by the British, fought to self-determine its own future. Nasser defined the 'cultural revolution' as needing to be specifically "hostile to imperialism."[46] The clear and present threat of imperialism generated a smattering of leftist government media, specifically literature and pamphlet material. They preached a national duty – "to act not in their own interests but in those of the (governmentally defined) whole."[47] Yet, this adherence to government defined ideals and goals indicated to many an adherence to soviet style rule. Soviet style rule, however, is a poor stereotype, as one of the most marked changes during early period of Nasser's rule was the freedom experienced by the media. The revolution ensured a freer

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[45]Jack Crabbs, Jr. "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, no. 4 (1975): 386-420.
[46] Ibid, 387.
[47] Ibid, 387.

exchange of information than was true for historians or journalists during the colonial period. As Nasser shifted away from liberal and democratic intuitions, he dissolved the constitution and subsequently all political parties that were tied to Egypt's colonial past. With power centralized, Nasser shifted the economic engine of Egypt towards large, state mediated, industry.

Nasser's power, specifically the popular nature of his tenure, was rooted in the rise of the middle class. During the late colonial period, only those with immense wealth and power participated in the political sphere. The 'new elite' saw the task of developing a populist-nationalist program as essential to creating a supportive and successful government. This coalition relied upon the charisma and anti-imperial sentiment to sustain itself. The large, and ballooning, bureaucratic state only continued on this path during the transition to Sadat.

While many of Sadat's biographies focus on his role in the Peace process in the Middle East, specifically Egypt's relationship with Israel, his domestic policy continued many of the unsustainable policies of his predecessor. In the years from 1952 to 1987 the state went from employing 350,000 people to over 3,000,000 people.[48] In part this practice became a way for the government to continue its socialized economy by providing jobs to all those who completed university.[49] These policies eventually led to a great deal of inefficiencies and corruption. Big government was in and of itself not the problem for Egypt, rather corruption and

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[48] Ginsburg, Tom, and Tamir Moustafa. *Rule by Law : The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes*. Cambridge [UK]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pg 133.

[49] Cochran, Judith. *Educational Roots of Political Crisis in Egypt*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008. Pg 67.

how the government was being run created a lack of faith in government institutions. Political officials took bribes and interactions with the state became costly and time consuming.

These policies help historians to understand how Egypt came to find itself in the crisis it faced from 1990 and onward. Moustafa, a political scientist focusing on the role of politics on democratic institutions in Egypt, presents data that indirectly demonstrates that it was not the concentration of power that frustrated the population; rather, it was the eventual shift from a nationalized market, with state owned industry, towards a private economy. It is not that neo-liberal policies were seen as bad to Egyptians, but that so much of the population became unemployed because of this shift towards privatization. In part this practice became a way for the government to continue its socialized economy by providing jobs to all those who completed university.[50] After the move towards a private, and a seemingly freer market economy, joblessness became a major concern. This practice of massive government employment became unsustainable in that the Government in Egypt could no longer sustain its promise to employ all those with an education. While privatization, and the implementation of checks on governmental rights of expropriation, led to higher rates of international investment, it also created vast unemployment. In a society where educated segments of the population were suddenly finding themselves unemployed, coalitions began to form to advocate, albeit illegally, for labor rights. These labor organizations eventually became a

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[50] Ibid.

major voice during the demonstrations as they often blamed the practices of

Mubarak and his predecessors for their current economic difficulties.

Mubarak, in an attempt to control the state and squash popular discontent,

extended his power through the use of secret police and the influence he held over

the military authority. As foreign investment increased, and the government

became unable to employ the educated segment of population, Mubarak was forced

to take a more hardline approach. Free speech was limited and political discontent

was unacceptable. Mubarak expanded the military and police force, in order to

control his population. No longer was the imperial threat ever-present, as such

unification against a shared fear, a threat against the state, no longer provided

enough social cohesion. Cohesion, and adherence to state policy was enforced not

through rhetoric and popular sentiment; rather, Mubarak used force, fear, and the

suppression of civil liberties to control society. These choices often incited protest

and discontent throughout Egyptian society. Mubarak became a shared enemy, a

threat to Egyptian prosperity. Looking forward, it is many of Mubarak's own

choices that helped unite the 2011 protests into such an effective demonstration of

mass uprising.

Timeline of Revolution

January 25-28th; a national holiday meant to commemorate Egyptian police

forces, mark what many consider the beginning of the end for Mubarak. Egyptians

took to the street declaring a "day of rage."[51] Even at this early stage in the protests,

Mubarak's police cracked down on protestors with tear gas and water cannons.

Soon protests spread throughout the country; by organizing online, protests

continued to engage more of the population. At the end of this day Mubarak blamed

the Muslim Brotherhood, a "technically banned" political organization, for

instigating the unrest.[52] Clashes between police and protestors became more

violent during this period; the crowds in Cairo continued to grow exponentially.

January 28th – February 2nd: this period marked a critical period during the

protests. In a demonstration of his ultimate power, Mubarak attempted to shut

down communication between the protestors by shutting down Internet and mobile

phone service in much of Egypt. While some phone calls and tweets still were able

to get out, the efforts of many Egyptians, and their friends outside of the country,

kept the channels of communication open so that the world could still know the

extent of the violence being perpetrated against protestors, who in large part,

sought to remain peaceful. During this period, Mubarak took steps he believed

would satisfy the demands of the population; firing his cabinet was seen as

insufficient solve the Egyptian people's ills. Tahrir Square became ground zero for

the protests; protestors moved into Tahrir Square and refused to leave despite the

encroachment of pro-Mubarak thugs and police attempting to force them out. By

January 31st over 250,000 people had gathered in Tahrir Square. The end of this

phase of the protest marks both the beginning of the most brutal violence, and

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[51] Al, Jazeera. "Timeline: Egypt's Revolution." AlJazeera English,
        http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html.
[52] Ibid.

another failed attempt of Mubarak to quell the protests by announcing that he did not intend to run for reelection. His refusal to step down was not only marked by an increased level of protest, but Mubarak allowed thousands of supporters, "armed with sticks and knives," to enter Tahrir Square to instill fear in the protestors.

February 2nd – February 11th; these final, and often violent days of protest, resulted in the eventual resignation of Mubarak and the transition of power to the Military Command. Bursts of gunfire peppered the nighttime soundtrack. Tahrir Square, which at this point began to resemble a large tent camp, had become the epicenter of the revolution. While protests continued in Alexandria and Suez, the protests in Cairo saw the civilian deaths. One report released by the Mubarak administration claimed that only 11 civilians died in a military crackdown on protests; United Nations estimates placed the death toll at over 300 in that same period. Even with the release of Wael Ghonim (the Google executive who became a figurehead during the protests) and a 15 per cent raise in salaries and pensions, Mubarak was unable appease the masses, and finally, with no other options, Mubarak turned over his power to the Military.

February 11th – February 14th: With Mubarak out of power, those in Tahrir square continued to protest through the early morning. Joining together they began to clean and clear the square. Traffic began to flow through the square and the police force began to restore Cairo to a sense of normalcy. Yet, on February 14th, thousands of protestors marched back into Tahrir Square. While the reasons for these continued protests will be of major concern later in this paper, what became

clear was that the removal of Mubarak was not the quick fix the protestors and many in the international community believed it would be.

Grievances:

While many smaller factions participated in the protests in Tahrir Square, it is essential that we focus on the key players. The largest contingencies in Tahrir Square consisted of the "non government sanctioned labor movement," the urban youth movement, civil society movements ("Kefaya [Enough!]") and members of the once banned Muslim Brotherhood.[53] While these contingencies all had their own agendas, their demands gradually became increasingly specific. The protestors demanded an immediate end to the 'state of emergency', a new constitution, the end of torture and police repression, reform of the corrupt judiciary, and the integration of other political parties.

These political groups, while they eventually seemed to unite behind the goal of removing Mubarak were each were rooted in their own, often-longstanding grievance with the state. Education, for example, became a critical point of contention with the protestors. Many well educated members of the middle class had been brought up to believe that hard work and an education would provide them with a career and pension large enough to sustain their families. Yet, with a shrinking world economy, and a consolidation of state bureaucracy towards more militaristic leadership, educated youth were either unemployed or underemployed.

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[53] Bix, Herbert. "The Middle East Revolutions in Historical Perspective: Egypt, the Palestinians, and the United States." *ZNET* (2011) pg, 3.

According to the Geneva Center for Security Policy, the Mubarak regime was too "rigid, autocratic, and militaristic to address the mounting socio-economic problems."[54]

While education and unemployment marked some of the most pressing social ills in Egypt, food shortages, corruption, and a brutal police crackdown on civil liberties over a long period of time tested the very fabric of Egyptian society. Each group of protestors maintained their own specific grievances, and each group of protestors had different methodologies to fix them. Before the protests in 2011, Egyptian's had a longstanding history of protesting against the state. However, during the 2011 protests there was a clear moment where the anger felt regarding local issues was supplanted by a hatred of Mubarak. In part, Social Media was responsible for this shift towards a common enemy and towards a moment of nationalism where a clear demand was made for a renewed Egyptian pride. The Internet, I will demonstrate, allowed the long oppressed Egyptian population reclaim its dignity and attempt to resolve the ills that plague modern Egypt.

Internet Usage:

As the social media market has become saturated in the United States, Facebook and Twitter expanded their presence in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Social media has become a part of our daily lives; however, as social media allows my peers and I to share information, organize parties, and keep in touch as we move on in our lives, in Egypt, protestors have been heard saying "we use Facebook to

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[54] Cheterian, Vicken. "The Arab Revolt: Roots and Perspectives." *GCSP Policy Papers*, no. 11 (2011): 6.

schedule the protests."[55] Social Media is "today's most transparent, engaging and interactive form of public relations. It combines the true grit of real time content with the beauty of authentic peer-to-peer communication."[56]

Facebook is by far the most popular social media website in Egypt and the Middle East. With over eight million users, Facebook is the most rapidly expanding social media outlet in the region. During the there was a marked increase in account creation so people could participate in the revolution. It is estimated that an even larger segment of the population access the website to read the postings of political leaders and activists.[57]   This expansion, without question, boosted the power of the protestors. Before the explosion of this technology, social networks were geographically defined, and community based. While this did provide its own benefits, it also limited the size and diversity of these groups. Internet technology changed everything. The Egyptian Ministry of Communications estimated that "70 million Egyptians own a mobile phone", which constitutes more than 85% of the population.[58]   While the explosion of mobile technology cannot be directly linked to the use of social media, it is clear that the technological capabilities in Egypt improved during this period. Most Egyptian's accessed facebook and twitter, not through their laptops, but through their cell phones. The explosion of cell phone technology and infrastructure allowed for more than a million people to participate

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[55] Chebib, Nadine, and Rabia Sohail. "The Reasons Social Media Contributed to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution." *International Journal of Business Research and Managment (IJBRM)* 2, no. 3 (2011): 139-62. 139.

[56] Buyers, Lisa. "How we define social media." http://socialprscoops.com. April 9, 2012.

[57] Chebib and Rabia, 140-142.

[58] Ibid, 140.

in the Twitter and Facebook discourse than ever before. This improvement was never more apparent than during the revolution itself when people tweeted how vital their cell phones were in communicating and organizing on facebook on twitter. Certainly there are not 70 million facebook users in Egypt, but it The expansion of mobile technology allows people to engage social media on the go, and as such, Social Media has become a part of daily life.

During this same period Twitter usage also blossomed. In the first quarter of 2011 the hashtags[59] #egypt, #jan25, and #protests were used more than 3.2 million times in Egypt and neighboring countries. Twitter, like Facebook, not only connected likeminded people through the Internet, but also allowed for the rapid dissemination of images. These images, which often depicted the bruises, cuts, burns, of those attacked by pro-Mubarak forces, not only rallied the population towards protest and against Mubarak, but they are also demonstrative of how the Internet, a relatively new technology, changed Egypt.

Egypt has, for decades, been "hiding major problems that caused poverty, high prices, social exclusion, elite enrichment, unemployment, and corruption in the country."[60] Yet, despite protests and local attempts to resolves these grievances, the protestors could not attain the necessary mass to affect true change in Egypt. Social Media, therefore, changed the way people communicate, and those who were once

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[59] Hashtag - A tag embedded in a message posted on the Twitter microblogging service, consisting of a word within the message prefixed with a hash sign. It is often used to indicate some important part of the message or an event or theme with which the entire comment is making reference to.
[60] Ibid, 142.

disengaged from the political sphere suddenly had the tools and the inspiration to begin marching their country towards democracy.

While scholars disagree regarding the degree to which Social Media was responsible for the Egyptian Revolution, what is not disputed is that the Internet had an accelerant effect on the protests. In a pre-Internet, pre-mobile society, community organizing required face-to-face interactions. Cafés, social clubs, and labor organizations were the locus from which protests spawned. Now that face-to-face communications can happen online, the coordination of protests and the dissemination of information, which used to take weeks, months, or even years, now can happen in seconds. This acceleration is powerful "as it allows ideas to spread more rapidly in densely connected social networks"[61] – dense networks only possible in an Internet connected world.

Those who credit social media for spawning the 2011 protests often credit the benefits of social media. The accessibility, low barriers to entry, low communication barriers, and ease of use, are all credited with making social networking more effective than earlier forms of communication. However, the claim that Social Media has caused the Egyptian protests or the Arab Spring are unwarranted. I will demonstrate that in fact the use of novel technology is nothing new in the history of protest and political change. First, however, we must understand how Social Media allowed these various concerns to come together as

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[61] Ibid, 145.

one, seemingly defined political message, and examine the politicalization of discontent.

Politicalization of Discontent:

One of the more difficult tasks for any revolution or social movement is attempting to align the interests of individual groups with the needs of the whole. Historically social movements have been criticized for "representing privileged groups and a poorer job of 'speaking for' the marginalized."[62] Yet, according to Weldon, the attraction to social action, especially from those who are most at risk of being disenfranchised, comes from the realization that political participation, specifically protests, has a direct correlation with representation. However, Egypt presented a slightly different case; due to the longstanding nature of social discontent, the 2011 protests sought to focus on commonalities amongst the various interest groups, rather than highlight differences which would "deepen exclusion and marginalization."[63] The sense of a common purpose, the sense that kept the millions of protestors in Tahrir square united behind the cause of removing Mubarak, only was effective so long as that common enemy existed. Once Mubarak was removed from power and the unifying common goal was achieved, cohesion waned and separate identities or interests began to be relevant again. In the end,

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[62] Weldon, Laurel. *When Protest Makes Policy: How Social Movment Represent Disadvantaged Groups.* Edited by Susan Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu, Cawp Series in Gender and American Politics. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011. Pg, 5.

[63] Ibid, 1.

the removal of Mubarak did little to fix Egypt's ills; still caught in the global economic tailspin, Egypt has a long uphill battle.

During the early organizing stages of the 2011 Egyptian protests, the message presented was unclear, a great deal of political interests were being represented and protestors rallied against a great many causes (police brutality, poor wages, etc). How then, did a unified (anti-Mubarak) message arise as the driving force of the movement? While some claim it was the expansion of the social sphere and the influx of Internet technology, however, a much more basic process was occurring. Those activists who were most effective at rallying the masses towards protest, were those who framed the issue in a way that most resonated with the disenfranchised. The political organizers who were most effective were those who not only presented a unified image and appealed to a larger Egyptian collective identity, but who also used social media to maintain, "sustained interactions" between the organizers and the masses.[64]

The ongoing debate surrounding the "net effect" questions whether the Internet steers the public away from democracy and towards special interests. The Internet is dominated by extreme positions – those that are utopian and those that are partisan. Both extremes are ineffective at coalescing resistance.[65] Those who ascribe to the utopian effects of the Internet claim that the low barriers to entry and the lack of centralized control inevitably leads towards egalitarian society. This is

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[64] Carty, 13.

[65] Rodman, Gilbert. "The Net Effect." In *Virtual Publics - Policy and Community in an Electronic Age*, edited by Beth Kolko. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. Pg, 12-13.

an oversimplification; while access is easy, gathering a following, amassing support

is not. Only those who are able guide the masses are able to wield the power of the

Internet.

Language and framing may be responsible for shifting the Egyptian

population towards revolution and shifting the message from a disorganized

coalition to an organized resistance but only the ease of access to mobile Internet

technology made possible the kind of interconnected and dense network seen in the

Egyptian revolution. While much of the remainder of this thesis will focus on the

specific language choices made throughout the revolution, it is important

nonetheless to understand that the cooptation of technology towards revolutionary

goals is not new.

Technology, alone, is not enough to ignite protest; the message presented

must in some way resonate with the receiver. The revolutionary message must be

made palatable to the local population, but the messages framed in a nationalistic

frame are often even more effective. Nationalism, according to John Dunn, is the

"starkest political shame of the twentieth century and at the same time the very

tissue of modern political sentiment."[66] The double bind of nationalism, the good

and bad side of nationalism, makes it difficult for a broad consensus concerning

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[66] Dahbour, Omar. *Illusions of the Peoples - a Critique of National Self-Determination*. Edited by James
    Sterba, Lexington Studies in Social, Political, and Legal Philsophy. Lanham: Lexington Books,
    2003. Pg, 1.

nationalism.[67] The Egyptian protestors believed that their protests were reviving the 'glory' and 'dignity' Egypt's great past.

Protestors claimed that Egypt's rich history imbued a right to self-determination. Policies that dehumanized the Egyptians were emblematic of Mubarak's regime. This predisposition against Mubarak often made anti-Mubarak rhetoric very appealing to the protestors. Yet, this very rhetoric is used by anti-nationalistic scholars; scholars who see nationalism as little more than a tool used by elites to maintain control over a population.[68]

Technology is Nothing New (A Case Study of Iran):

In 1978-1979 Iran underwent a dramatic transformation from a formal state centered around western ideals and a sense of entitlement to a deeply religious and far more traditional religiously oriented state. The Iranian revolution is sometimes termed the 'small media' revolution.[69] Television, considered the easiest way to access the population, was dominated by pro Shah propaganda, some of which was produced by US interests who saw the Shah as an ally helping to spread western technology to the Middle East. Iran's leadership saw Western technology as universally good as it "[can] be naturalized into the development scheme in a way that ideological and political institutions [can] not".[70] Western technology was

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[67] Ibid, 17-20
[68] Ibid, 91-117.
[69] Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle, and Ali Mohabmmadi. *Small Media, Big Revolution*. Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

[70] Mowlana, Hamid. "Technology Versus Tradition: Communication in the Iranina Revolution." *Journal of Communication*, no. Summer (1979). 107.

believed, at the time, to be the key to economic prosperity and a way to gain global acceptance in the geopolitical context of the region. Policies that presented an idealized western ideology created a rift within the Iranian society. While the ruling class and the elites were enamored by Western market capitalism, the urban poor had limited access to such extravagancies.[71]

The traditional forms of mass media – "the press, magazines, radio, and TV, were dominated by the Western products."[72] While literacy, population, and per-capita income increased in Iran under the Shah, protests began to organize in the urban centers – inequality was so glaring that some felt called to action. Pushed out of modern mass media, the revolutionaries were forced to return to traditional channels of communication. Public meetings were held and the bazaar became a daily exchange of not only goods, but ideas and revolutionary tactics. The bazaar was so integrated into daily life that information spread at almost incomprehensible speeds.[73]

These revolutionaries sought for a 'retraditionalization' of Iran – a return to a conservative and religiously centered ideology. Unable to capitalize on modern mass media, the revolutionaries needed to find novel ways to communicate with and inspire the masses. 'Small media' thus presented itself as an ideal solution; using cassette tapes, Xeroxed flyers, tape recorders, and face-to-face interactions, the revolutionaries were able to spread their religious message – the message of

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[71] Ibid, 107.
[72] Ibid, 108.
[73] Ibid, 108.

Ayatollah Khomeini. Using 'small media' and a message of 'retraditionalization' was

alone not enough; the revolutionary message was further framed through a populist

rhetoric which acted as "the basis for a massive political mobilization."[74] Religious

and populist sentiments dominated the revolutionary discourse; however, the

Iranian revolution was effective because it was a revolution based on an open, yet

secret, dense network of communication. Revolutionaries did not build or seek to

work outside of an existing structure; instead they co-opted the "politico-religious

leadership" and orchestrated the distribution of "religious commands to an

audience already predisposed to listen."[75]

Khomeini's speeches and religious sermons spread throughout Iran; they

were shared at private gatherings, played through mosque loudspeakers, all of

which were telephoned in by Khomeini from abroad. These examples from Iran

provide a useful foil to discuss Egypt. Egypt, much like Iran, had a large segment of

the population that felt disenfranchised; they were primed and open to the

revolutionary message of change as they had for too long been neglected. Useful as

well are the similarities between the use of technology to serve the needs of the

revolution. While Egypt used Twitter and Facebook (very new technologies), they,

like Khomeini's cassette tapes, engaged this very disenfranchised population in a

way that resonated. Technology spawned political discourse and engaged much

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[74] Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle, and Ali Mohabmmadi., xviii.
[75] Ibid, xviii.

more of the population. Suddenly the protestors felt ownership of their country,

and an opportunity to affect change in their society.[76]

The growth in awareness in Iran was directly correlated to the effective use

of 'small media.' Not unlike Iran, Egypt too had its own unmediated form of

communication, which allowed for information sharing at a rate that face-to-face

communication precluded. Benedict Anderson's imaged communities rely on the

belief that while I may never meet some of the other members of my community, I

believe, mainly through shared experiences or rituals that they are striving for

similar goals. In an age of Facebook, where our lives are available online for anyone

to read, that imagined community is reinforced by the shrinking world that Social

Media has created. As such, no longer do people need to believe that their

compatriots are seeking the same goals; they can see it though syndicated blogs,

Facebook pages, and Twitter users. The public sphere in Egypt was opened for

anyone who wished to share a political point of view. While some of these views are

rejected, by finding commonalities between blogs, tweets, and unofficial press

release, we are able to pinpoint what issues resonated with the Egyptian population.

In the end, "all revolutions write their own scripts, and their media is part of that

process."[77]

Iran's population sought to reconnect with its religious roots and create

equality in a system so devoid of it during the Shah's regime. Revolutions are the

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[76] Further Reading – Kepel, Gilles. *Muslim Extremism in Egypt - the Prophet and Pharaoh*. Berkeley
    and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.

[77] Ibid, xxi.

confrontation of state structure and individual agency. However Iran, and

subsequently Egypt faced one fundamental problem:

> However inventive their network of small media was in creating
> a political space, all the channels in the world are no substitution
> for a language, a political discourse that is accessible to the
> people and articulates their sense of self and already felt
> grievances and concerns.[78]

A protest is fundamentally flawed if it cannot address the longstanding concerns of

the people and simultaneously presents a solution to these ills. In Egypt, the

solution, the unifying image, was that of Mubarak. However, in Egypt, unlike in Iran,

Mubarak and the Egyptian people did not have the same ideological rift which was

the impetus for the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s. In Iran, language choices

were very important as we analyze how revolutionary messages are highly crafted

towards a certain result. In Iran, Khomeini addressed the people as "mellat-e agah

va mobarez va shoja-ye Iran, 'the aware, radical, and courageous people of Iran.'"[79]

Crafting the image of a powerful, new, and Islamic state, Khomeini made constant

reference to the 'courageous nation', 'the oppressed of Iran', and 'the Islamic

faithful.'[80] The desire for retraditionalization as well as discontent with the

western-leaning government primed the population towards Khomeini's Islamic

state. His words, which only sought to unite the people, were "transmuted into a

desire for an Islamic state" a goal not directly mentioned in his cassette tapes.[81] In

conclusion, while Iran and Egypt are certainly different revolutions insofar as their

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[78] Mowlana, 105.
[79] Ibid, 106.
[80] Ibid, 106.
[81] Ibid, 106-7.

historical context, what is clear, is that the use of technology plays an integral part in inspiring change and engaging a population.

Alive in Egypt – Tweets from the Ground in Egypt:

One of the key measures through which I will evaluate the revolution is through the analysis of Tweets that were sent during the revolution. Reading thousands of tweets translated online through Google's 'Speak to Tweet' program, and through books like Tweets from Tahrir a narrative begins to form and a clear pattern emerges as frames and the way messages are encoded[82] shift throughout the revolution. That being said, my work here is limited by my lack of Arabic language skills as well as the second hand nature of my material.[83] I am forced to trust that those who translated these tweets from Arabic to English were able to notice the nuances and shifts in language. Furthermore, I must admit that my language barriers limit my ability to notice nuances that might only be apparent in the original Arabic. While these considerations are important, the vast scholarship I have read leads me to believe that the conclusions I have drawn from these tweets are valid.

Never before had the daily events of a revolution been preserved in thousands upon thousands of first hand 140 character messages. In Egypt protestors communicated using blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. Reporters, professional organizers, and ordinary citizens all participated in this open and free

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[82] See Stuart Hall and Robert Entman
[83] I say second hand because the tweets I have been using were already translated from Arabic into English before I was able to retrieve them.

discourse. In the early stages tweets focused on highlighting the various inequities in Egypt and presented a non-cohesive set of demands. Protests on and before #Jan25 were small and fractured, each with their own goals and aspirations.

Adamakary – #jan25 protester's demands: increase in minimum wage, dismissal of interior ministry, removal of emergency law, shorten presidential term[84]

Specific attacks on Mubarak had yet to enter the blogosphere, the early tweets were purposed with helping spread information and helping protestors to organize their movement.

ManarMohsen – Those tweeting about the protest in Egypt, please use the hashtag #Jan25 in order to spread any information.[85]

In the early stages, protestors saw their struggle in larger geopolitical contexts such as the events that had taken place in Tunisia. Protestors and bloggers channeled the Tunisian movement by chanting " LEAVE! … Just like #Tunisia."[86] The early stages of the protests did not have the same unified feeling or nationalistic terming that came to define the later, and more violent, aspects of the revolution.

Suddenly, on #Jan25, the tweets took a dramatic shift in response to police and military intervention with the protests. Within one hour tweets about other protests and other issues subsided and the Twitter mob began directly responding to the violence being perpetrated by those loyal to Hosni Mubarak.

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[84] Idle, Nadia, and Alex Nunns, eds. *Tweets from Tahrir*. New York: OR Books, 2011. Pg, 33.
[85] Ibid, 33.
[86] Ibid, 37.

TravellerW – Tear gas!!

Monasosh – Eyes burning fuck #jan25

Norashalaby – Tear gas is fucking deadly. Cant see! [87]

Violence, specifically violence perpetrated against peaceful protestors, older protestors, and children was seen as particularly heinous and became the rallying cry for many of the organizers at Tahrir square who were begging people to stop reading about the revolution and to come out and be a part of it. Hosni Mubarak's regime reacted to this growing movement by shutting down much of the Internet in Egypt forcing many political organizers to rely on the satellite connections of their friends in the foreign media and through proxies outside of the blackout zone.

As larger and larger groups continued to amass in Tahrir Square, protestor and Google executive Wael Ghonim stated that "Egypt after #jan25 is no way going to be the same as Egypt before it. Today we proved so many points."[88] Empowered by the masses in Tahrir Square and outraged by the tactics Mubarak was using as he attempted to squash the uprising, a shift in tone began to focus on Mubarak as the ultimate manifestation of evil. The protestors began appropriated, not only local issues, but trans-national discourses on human rights. Global outrage at the violence in Egypt found its way into the tweets coming out of Egypt – "End the violence, tell your friends at home and abroad #EGYPT #JAN25."[89] Goals became more focused and protests once focused on certain issues were now more

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[87] Ibid, 39.
[88] Ibid, 35.
[89] Ibid, 43.

nationalistic, appealing to a wider audience by speaking about freedom and the change Egypt would soon see. While there was not a nationalist demand for a total overthrow over government, for a true revolution, there was a sense of national pride that could most directly be seen through a common and unwavering hatred of Mubarak. At the same time, there also was a shift towards a more Islamized frame, one that coincided with the Arab Spring as it unfolded throughout the region.

Gsquare86 – revolution is keeping me sleepless thinking, anticipating, dreaming, and reflecting, I want to wake up to a better and free #Egypt[90]

Ghonim (Wael Ghonim) – Pray for #Egypt. Very worried as it seems that government is planning a war crime tomorrow against people. We are all ready to die #Jan25[91]

Sandmonkey – crowd in tahrir keeps growing. Were not going anywhere #jan25[92]

These tweets demonstrate a shift in language that is indicative of how the revolutionary organizers adopted new frames, such as Anti-Mubarak frames, and resistance frames, as highlighted by Entman and Hall, in order to better serve their purposes. Suddenly tweets spoke to the glory of Egypt's past and its potential future in a Post Mubarak environment. Local issues became subjugated to a more powerful anti-Mubarak sentiment and took hold because the Egyptian society, so frustrated by the failure of previous protests, saw the potential unification powers of these new frames and capitalized on the opportunity for change on a national level. Nationalism was not the overwhelming discourse during the protests. The

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[90] Ibid, 74.
[91] Ibid, 120
[92] Ibid, 107

protests were mostly concerned with the social issues that plagued Egypt. However, there was a moment during the protests where these local or social issues were put aside for the larger goals of removing Mubarak from power. This, as I have state before, is akin to a nationalistic fervor.

While the language of the protestors shifted in response to violence and a growing sentiment that the only way to have positive change in Egypt is to radically reshape the way it is governed, mistakes, or at least poor judgment calls, by Mubarak helped fuel national cohesiveness and drive a disparate community together. Mubarak had for so long maintained his power through the use of fear and covert and secret police. During the protests Mubarak ordered planes to fly over Tahrir Square in bombing formations in order to scare the protestors and get them to leave. Mubarak shut down the Internet and limited the public sphere. He forced state controlled media to present biased and untrue factual accounts of the protests. All of these decisions, while purportedly to bring calm to Egypt, did nothing but unite the protestors against their now common enemy – Mubarak.

Gsquare86 – The Egyptian people WILL NOT STOP until Mubarak is OUT!! The protests are only increasing in number and media is lying[93]

3arabawy – Internet is still blocked on ISPs: TEDATA and Link. I'm using a satellite connection via a journalist friend now. It's VERY SLOW however.[94]

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[93] Ibid, 80.
[94] Ibid, 89.

ashrafkhalil -#Jan25 Confirmed 1st person that Shahira Amin deputy director of state-run Nile TV has resigned in protest over biased coverage.[95]

- *I saw at least a dozen guys coming back badly bloodied from the front line. Incredibly violent scene and the soldiers are just watching.*[96]

Mubarak must go; this sentiment rang out throughout Tahrir Square during the most intense protest. Distrust turned to anger and protestors refused to succumb to the violence and lies perpetrated by Mubarak and the state controlled media. The will of the Egyptian people shined through the cloud of misinformation. Egyptians called to their great past and the historical glory of Egypt in order to rally everyone, young and old, into protest.

Ghonim (Wael Ghonim) – They lied at us. Told us Egypt died 30 years ago, but millions of Egyptians decided to search and they found their country in 18 days #Jan25.[97]

3arabawy – I cant recall how many times we thought we're about to b massacred & our revolution d' be squashed. Still the will of the people prevailed.[98]

The evidence of nationalism is weak; Twitter and Facebook clearly supported a push towards change, but there was brief and specific moment where the anti-Mubarak discourse became so intense that it can be considered a nationalist discourse. Millions of people were mobilized towards one very simple goal – a change in Egypt's leadership. The protestors in Egypt self identified as Egyptians and sought,

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[95] Ibid, 127.
[96] Ibid, 120
[97] Ibid, 100
[98] Ibid, 219

through their words and actions, to reclaim their identity. While the nationalism in Egypt is nothing new, the Egyptian population was so fatigued from life under Mubarak that their faith in government and bureaucratic institutions had all but evaporated. The revolution, therefore, is not the birth of a new Egyptian nationalism or a desire for a new state, rather a desire to reclaim Egypt's former glory. The people of Egypt sought to reclaim their dignity; their protest and tweets speak to their intense desire for change in leadership. Each protestor came to the street for their own individual reasons. Some associated with the larger messages of change and democracy, while some protestors remained rooted in their original grievances. It was realized that only with collective action could the protestors individual needs be meet. Only by working in the larger confines of the anti-Mubarak frame, which rallied so many millions to the streets, could real change happen. For many of the protestors, all else seemed to fade to the background as Mubarak became synonymous with a cancer upon Egypt needing to be excised.

Some may perceive my analysis to this point to ascribe to a belief that with greater modernization and the influx of mobile technology that there is a greater shift towards secularization. While, I do believe that, technology and modernity can be a precursor to democracy and representative rule, I want to make clear that Egypt is not moving towards a more secular state. If anything, the most recent elections in Egypt have demonstrated the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. Their dominance in the most recent parliamentary elections and their decision to float a candidate for president in the future, demonstrates that technology and subsequently modernity will lead to a more open electoral process.

The outcome of these and future elections may or may not lead to greater secularization, but what is important, for the purposes of this inquiry, is the affect that social media had on the changes seen in Egypt and what effect it will have going forward.

Even as celebrations rang throughout Egypt, the protests were already considered both successful and unsuccessful. Protestors immediately flooded the blogosphere with unyielding joy for the departure of Mubarak and the promise of transition to civilian rule. The complexities of the protests became apparent no more than a few days after Mubarak stepped down when protestors began to realize that while the figurehead of their discontent was gone, the original problems remained. The same segment of the Egyptian population that mobilized to protest against Mubarak suddenly found themselves back in the same situation before Mubarak stepped down. The unemployed poor, while educated, remain unemployed or underemployed unable to provide for their families.

3arabawy – While middle class activists here on Twitter r urging Egyptians to return to work, the working class strikes and protests continue. #Jan25.[99]

Gsquare86 – Plus Tahrir is the people's square, we can always come and sit-in if we find that our revolution is being hijacked.[100]

Sharifkouddous – people debating whether to leave #Tahrir following military announcement that Mubarak cabinet staying place. #Egypt.[101]

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[99] Ibid, 226
[100] Ibid, 227

Scholars sometimes question if the events that transpired in Egypt truly can be called a revolution. I agree that the events do not truly represent a revolution as there was no change in political order and the structure of Egypt's government did not change. However, there was a political refiguring. Not only was Mubarak removed from power, but Egypt demonstrated a new way in which a population was engaged and actively pursuing its own future. It demanded equality and demanded that its government address the social ills that had plagued the country for decades. Egypt, specifically I believe because of Social Media, was so effective because it appropriated trans-national discourses of human rights, equality, and urban poverty into its political discourse. Egypt's population, which for so long had been disenfranchised and made to survive without the help of its government, appropriated international or universal discourses about what is right and what is wrong. In Egypt, there seemed to be the adaptation of humanistic demands. We are human and we have dignity are the claims that rang out as Mubarak perpetrated unthinkable violence against the protestors. These were the cries from Tahrir Square; these are the powerful ideas that inspired a nation. Thus, while revolution is a loaded term, it cannot be denied that Egypt, by using social media, has begun the long road towards a better and stronger future – a future where the people voice must always be heard first.

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[101] Ibid, 227

Conclusion:

The 2011 Egyptian revolution leaves many unanswered questions. While the later goals of the revolution were achieved with the removal of Mubarak, the success of the revolution has, by many scholars, been called into question. The current state of unrest in Egypt along with the inability for the new transitional Egyptian government to successfully remedy and resolve years of corruption, mistrust, and poor economic conditions have left the people of Egypt tethered the despair that spawned the protests in the first place. When in the past generational divides caused people to define themselves in contrast to the youth, these protests were marked not by a generational divide, rather they were defined through a direct contrast against former president Mubarak.[102] Yet, the failure of the revolution to address many of the key concerns raised in the early stages requires us to consider that Facebook and Twitter played a profound role on the revolution, and not, as has often been touted, a wholly positive role.

The Internet is no longer this thing of awe; the Internet has become embedded into daily life into the community.[103] Where once their existed a café culture and the need for face to face communication in order to organize, now face to face communication can happen from thousands of miles away in a face to face interaction via the Internet. Yet, despite this technology's ability to connect people

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[102] Shahine, Selim. "Youth and the Revolution in Egypt." *Anthropology Today* 27, no. 2 (2011): 1-3.

[103] Wellman, Barry, Anabel Quan-Haase, Jeffrey Boase, Wenhong Chen, Keith Hampton, Isabel Isla-de-Diaz, and Kakuko Miyata. "The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism." *JCMC* 8, no. 3 (2003).

across the world, Twitter and Facebook present new, unforeseen limitations.

Twitter, for example, limits its users to 140 individual characters per post.

Facebook on the other hand, while not limiting the size of an update, often its users

tend to also present frequent short updates.[104] Thus, considering the short nature

of these updates, ideas and complex issues tend to be reduced to their most simple

frame. In Egypt, that frame was shifted towards Mubarak as the central enemy – the

cause of all ills. Facebook and Twitter therefore, while being responsible for the

rapid communication that helped mobilize the population in Egypt, had unforeseen

consequences, mainly that despite achieving their main stated goal, the protestors

and the continued protest seen in post-revolution Egypt is indicative of the

reductive power of Social Media. Social Media, while allowing for the collecting of

people on a massive scale, seems to have limited the diversity and plurality in Egypt,

specifically when it comes to the specific issues being protested. While the social

issues did not disappear, there was a moment where the hatred of Mubarak became

so universal that the facebook and twitter were so inundated with Anti-Mubarak

messages that any discussion of social issues faded into the background. In a post

revolution Egypt, the blogosphere has become inundated with many more points of

view.

A blog called The <u>Engine Room</u> started after the Egyptian revolution with the

simple goal of helping understand the role of new technology as a resource in

protest and political organization in the modern technological world. One article of

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[104] Ibid.

great interest addresses the consequences of the rapid expansion of the social

sphere in Egypt, specifically the now overwhelming quantity of participants in social

media and the number of updates they post.[105] The issue, in a post revolution Egypt

is not so much "whether an activist has launched the right new party, new initiative

or new campaign. The issue now is filtering through all the initiatives and

identifying those that are being most effectively managed, and trimming away the

fat." This excessive splintering, due to the low barriers to access, have created an

overabundance of participants in the social and political discourse. Thus, while

Habermas is useful in helping understanding how the expansion of the social sphere

can give way to revolution or at least change, he could have done little to predict the

rise of Social Media and the way in which the world now communicates. Twitter

and Facebook present unique problems, while they are excellent resources for

engaging an otherwise apathetic population, they also have the potential to develop

a collective action problem. It is very easy to protest from behind a phone or a

computer domain; it is not always so easy to inspire people to take to the streets.

While Egypt was unique in that people took to the streets in droves, little has been

done in a post Mubarak Egypt to address the original social issues that moved

people to protest. Hiding behind a digital blind, Internet users can quickly amass a

following, but it remains questionable if they are able to build trust. I believe that

Egypt, post revolution, is an example of how as Internet communications have

become flooded with an overabundance of information, which has caused some

protestors to question the validity of what they see online. Twitter and Facebook

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[105] https://www.theengineroom.org/?p=679

were effective during the revolution mainly because it inspired people to action.

The messages and demands presented were in many ways universal and inspired

people to action. However, with an overabundance of new material in the social

sphere, the benefits of the Internet may be why it is ineffective during the rebuilding

stages. Apathy and a collective action problems plague those who rely on the

Internet to amass support. As larger goals are met, like removing Mubarak from

power, the need to address smaller goals, like controlling food prices, go

unaddressed because people now believe that an online presence is enough to

sustain change, which it clearly is not.

Anderson, on the other hand, seems to have many of the broad strokes

understood the complexities of technology and its affect on nationalism. The

Internet, like the rise of print media saw simultaneous expansion in both the

accessibility of information and in the number of people who participated.[106] Yet,

unlike the book, the Internet has reached a point where the barriers to participate

are so low that it both inspires egalitarianism, the idea that anyone no matter how

small can participate and make a difference, and creates inefficiency. Technology,

specifically Facebook and Twitter, caused many of the real or pressing issues to take

a back seat to ideology and nationalism.

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[106] In the case of print media, the translation of texts into their local vernaculars allowed many of those who did not read in the past to participate in discourse because suddenly the foundational texts were accessible to them in their native language. Similarly, in Egypt, those who may not have felt comfortable engaging in the more formal and face to face interactions of the café-culture of earlier Egyptian protests, now were able to participate, mainly because a new technology (printing press/internet) were able to lower the barriers to access and fostered new and faster conversations.

Facebook and Twitter was a great tool in the revival of Egypt. After years of unsuccessful protest the key factor that suddenly made these protests into a revolution is the addition of Facebook, Twitter, and the explosion of mobile Internet technology. People could organize faster, share information faster, and connect and build relationships faster than ever before. Yet, like the cassette tapes in Iran, books during the rise of print media, and any other advancement, technology is a critical tool for the success of revolutions, while at the same time, it brings its own problems. The future of Egypt is bright, the continued expansion of Facebook and Twitter is inevitable; we can only hope that eventually as members of the Egyptian community sift through the wealth of ideas of political interests represented in the blogosphere that the proverbial 'little guy' can continue to be heard. While Twitter and Facebook may have had a narrowing effect during the height of the protest, limiting the blogosphere to a discussion of Mubarak's evils, having an unrestricted forum for information exchange has the potential to be a great tool political participation and a freer and more democratic world.

Afterword:

This thesis proved a surprisingly ambitious project, one with many more difficulties than I had originally anticipated. My work here has only begun to scratch the surface of what is and will become a vast and I hope new scholarship on modern nationalism and the marriage of technology and political change. The Internet, as I have stated before, has reshaped the global political landscape; anyone with a laptop can now upload their thoughts and political beliefs online in the hopes

of sharing and influencing like-minded individuals. Governments and large

corporations are less able to control how information is shared than any time in the

past 50 years. Considering that I have only scratched the surface of this topic, I want

to highlight what I believe is the key takeaway from this thesis – that only when we

step back, away from the minute details and attempt to synthesize the scholarship

of a great many thinkers do we come close to understanding the complexities of

what happened in Egypt. Fanon, Habermas, Entman, Hall, and many others have all

provided one lens, one avenue through which we can understand the 2011

revolution. My hope is that future scholarship continues to find a balance between

the specific and the highly local issues, with the larger regional context, and the

various fields of scholarship that I have pulled from in this research. It is my belief

that only a synergistic thinker can fully understand how Mubarak was eventually

forced out of power.

Finally, it is important to remember that while Egypt is often termed as part

of the Arab Spring and presented as a Middle Eastern issue, its relevance and impact

on the rest of Africa, and the world for that matter, are yet to be seen. The most

recent elections in Egypt saw Islamic segments in society take a large percentage of

the seats in the new government. It is with this in mind that I again point a need for

more scholarship on Egypt as it resolves its internal issues and moves towards more

democratic principles. As I stated before, there is a lot to be learned from Egypt, we

must watch, observe, and assist when appropriate, for the mobilization in Egypt,

while not wholly good, is unparalleled in my lifetime, and must remain ever-present

in our minds as we continue to address the political changes now underway in Syria

and Bahrain.

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