IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ARAB SPRING: SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON TUNISIA'S UPRISING

*Saifuzzaman

Research Scholar, Department of West Asian studies and North African studies, AMU, Aligarh

ABSTRACT

Almost immediately after the Arab uprisings began, there was debate over the role and influence of social media in the overthrow of Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and the imminent coup of Mubarak. In covering what some deemed the Facebook or Twitter revolutions, the media focused heavily on young protesters mobilizing in the streets in political opposition, smartphones in hand. And since then, the violent and sectarian unrest in Syria has brought increased attention to the role of citizen journalism. Social media indeed played a part in the Arab uprisings. Networks formed online were crucial in organizing a core group of activists. Civil society leaders in Arab countries emphasized the role of "the internet, mobile phones, and social media" in the protests. Additionally, digital media has been used by Arabs to exercise freedom of speech and as a space for civic engagement. This paper aims to demonstrate why the role of social media in the Arab Spring cannot be disregarded. This paper does not argue that social media caused the Arab Spring but was an essential tool impacting the way in which the Arab Spring occurred. Social media as a tool had positive and negative impacts on the Arab Spring shaping different outcomes in different regions. Egypt and Tunisia fall under the regions where social media proved to be more efficient and who experienced more positive than negative impacts. The rest of the regions including Libya, Yemen, Algeria, Bahrain and Syria were shown to benefit less from social media whose functions backfired due to high government intervention. Special emphasis will be on the impact of Tunisia's uprising.

*Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The popular unrest and demonstrations that started in Tunisia in late 2010 and spread across North Africa and the wider Middle East has become known as the "Arab spring" and sometimes as the "Arab spring and winter", "Arab Awakening or Arab Uprisings" and while some are calling this the "jasmine revolution", quite a few Arabs also calling it the "Tunisian intifada" and we also call this the revolution of Mohamed Bouazizi. These revolts have directly led to the overthrow of several decades old regimes and their leaders were gone: Zine al- Abidine ben Ali in Tunisia; Gadhafi in Libya; Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen; and most dramatically, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Monarchies in Morocco, Jordan and Bahrain enacted reforms to varying degrees in attempts to stave off wider-scale protests.

Tragically, Syria descended into a viciouscivil war.(Fisherman, 2015)The Arab springhad many causes. One of the sources was social media and its power to put a human face on political coercion.Technology like Facebook, twitter, Skype, internet, SMS and MMS played animportant role to facilitated these protests into broad mobilization. These websites allowed protesters to spread their message of revolution at a rate which would have been impossible without these websites. Social media were particularly pivotal in Tunisia due to the country's high rate of internet usage, at the time of the revolt, one-third of the population used the internet which among the highest usage rates in Africa.(Angrist, 2013).In the 2011, social media networks played a central role in the swift breakup of at least two regimes in Arab spring protest (Stepanova, The Role of Information Communication

Technologies in the Arab Spring", 2011). It is quite possible that news of these protests would have been localized exclusive of the facilitation of communication provided by social media, allowing for a quick government crackdown on these protestors and the relegation of this chapter in the Arabic world's history to a mere sentence of reported "insurrection and subsequent government intervention" in legal records(Alhindi, 2012). Spreading of the news of these protests were also facilitated by modern technology to countries across the globe, and allowed for those countries which, at least on paper, support democracy and oppose authoritarian regimes, to lend theirpolitical support to these protestors and to ensure that violence against these protestors would be decreased(Mikeraglass, 2011).

In 2011 there were a number of revolutionary political movements in the Arab world. Today, thesemovements, which had shared the root causes, common values and strategies of civil resistance, are sometimes jointly referred to as the "Arab spring". During these events and from the point of view of the media reports they are called by the catchy words, displayed the "Twitter" or "Facebook Revolution". This suggests an important role for the respective Internet services and in fact they were used in a number of ways of authoritarian and repressive both Governments and by the opposition movements, which challenged them. Right from the beginning, no doubt that these terms are very misleading and exaggerating the role of social media in Arab revolutions and that the Arab revolutions would most likely still have taken place without the Internet, just like prior revolutions have also taken place with the respective communication technologies that were available at their time(Cohen, 2011). Social medianetworks played a significant role in the fast breakup of at least two regimes in the 2011 "Arab Spring" protests, Tunisia and Egypt, while also contributing to sociopolitical activation in Syria and Bahrain. In Egypt, the sociopolitical gap between the small ruling elite and the bulk of the population had long reached dangerous levels, prompting the majority of experts on the region to envisage a main trouble at some point. However, the reality that the disaster took place faster rather than later, in direct follow-up to protests in Tunisia, was largely due to the preliminary mobilizing affects of ICT and social media networks.

The foundations of Tunisia's transition

Tunisia that small North African "republic" state,on the Arab world's western shores, was born 60 years ago, has for past some years been the scene of a social uprising rare in this tightly controlled part of the world. This outburst of popular anger was ignited by an unemployed 26-year old university graduate named Mohamed Bouazizi setting himself ablaze outside a police station in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010. He subsequently died of his injuries on 4 January `2011. Soon afterwards another young man electrocuted himself, shouted "Nounemployment, no misery!" and more attempted suicides have been reported since. Bouazizi's actions set off an escalating series of antigovernment demonstrations in Sidi Bouzid and across the rest of Tunisia. By late December 2010, these protests had reached the capital, Tunis. On 14 January 2011, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled the country largely unchallenged for the previous twenty-three years, fled Tunisia for exile in Saudi Arabia(Ghannoushi, 2011).

Tunisia's transition has been supported by several factors(Rowsell, 2015)-:

- As a small country with a relatively homogenous population and limited experience of division along ethnic or religious lines, Tunisian societal patterns were reinforced by ottoman and French colonial powers who viewed the region as a vicinity of sorts.
- Since independence in 1956, there have been just two presidents-one was Habib Bourguiba and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, both of whom applied an iron fist and neither of whom left office voluntarily, so a touch of giddiness at finding themselves sans strongman and free to speak out is understandable.
- With civilian leadership and a ban on political participation, the allowance of a limited number of opposition political parties, Tunisia's military assumed a subservient role to the decision-making, which it largely maintained throughout the following 60 years.
- As in many Arab nations, political despotism and socio-economic failure is acute in Tunisia. And this unrest points to the reality hidden behind the façade of tourist brochures and lavish resorts exhibited to the outside world. This is the world of ordinary Tunisians, of a rapidly depleted middle class crushed under weight of rampant privatization and a decreasing public sector, of soaring prices, debt, unemployment, social marginalization and young men boarding " death boats" in the hope of escape to the other side of the Mediterranean.

Events in Tunisia are of far greater import for west Asia, and the Arab world in particular, than the immediate fact of a people's revolt forcing a head of state out of power. For one, it is a rare example of people trying to force out a regime, rather than yet another coup effecting regime change. Two, this is, patently, a secular uprising, not something instigated by Islamism, the specter of which is often deployed by the west and the ruling elites in west Asia to maintain the status quo. Three, not without reason, therefore, are events in Tunisia a cause for worry for many of the authoritarian regimes in west Asia(Times, 2011).

Internet in Tunisia

Tunisia has one of the most developed telecommunications infrastructures in North Africa, with a high mobile penetration rate and one of the lowest broadband prices in Africa(Paul Budde Communication Pty., 2009). As of October2008, the number of GSM subscribers had reached 9 million, while the number of Internet users was 1.7 million, 114,000 of whom have broadband subscriptions(Tunisia Online News, 2008).Out of a population of 10.2 million, nine out of ten Tunisians own a cell phone. Of the Internet users, 84 percent access the Internet at home, 75.8 percentage use it at work, and 24 percent use Internet cafe´s(Arab Advisors Group, 2008). The Tunisian Ministry of Communications established the Tunisian Internet Agency(ATI) to regulate the country's Internet and DNS services, which had formerly fallen under the purview of the Regional Institute for Computer Sciences and Telecommunications (IRSIT)(Tunisia Online, 2002). The ATI is also the gateway from which all of Tunisia's 11 ISPs lease their bandwidth. Six of these ISPs are public (ATI, INBMI, CCK, CIMSP, IRESA, and Defense's ISP); the other five— Planet Tunisie, 3S Global Net, HEXABYTE, Top Net, and

TUNET—are private. The government has made concentrated efforts to spread Internet access. The ATI reports connectivity of 100 percent for the education sector (universities, research laboratories, secondary schools, and primary schools). Government-brokered ''free Internet'' programs that provide Web access for the price of a local telephone call and increased competition among ISPs have significantly reduced the economic barriers to Internet access(Tunisian Internet Agency). Tunisians for whom personal computers remain prohibitively expensive may access the Internet from more than 300 Internet café´s set up by the authorities(Tunisia: Annual Report, 2008).

Role of social media in Arab Spring

Social media played a key role in Arabs countries, because it is an ideal tool to connect the free networks Association, which collects different groups and individuals for same cause? It does not give you the limitations. What happens in the Libya, Bahrain, Tunisia, and Egypt and who motivated and enables the demonstrators in Libya, Syria and Yemen. We have seen digital activists supporting Egyptians and Morocco's; it teaches us how to use these new tools. Care must be taken in exaggerating the role of social media; it is just a tool. Andy Williamson (2011) says that social media have a significant role in the contemporary revolutionary movements; we see around 40-45 tweets per minute from Egypt and 30-35 per minute of the Syria and the Libya, in Middle East and North Africa we are witnessing a wave of protest of citizens against the autocratic and corrupt regime carried out(Williamson, 2011). The "Arab Social Media Report" by the Dubai School of Government provides penetration and usage data of some new media services within the respective region. For example, according to this report, in spring 2011 Facebook had a penetration rate of 22.49% in Tunisia, and 7.66% in Egypt. Twitter had a penetration rate of 0.34% in Tunisia, and 0.15% in Egypt(Dubai, 2011). Pivotal to the revolutions that quietly overthrew regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and pushed for change and reform in other countries throughout the region has been the role of the new social media in transforming ideas shared in cyberspace into real-life action on the ground(DeLong-Bas, 2011).

By doing deep analysis of how helpful these technologies can potentially be for governments and oppositions, it is essential to also take a closer view at how precisely they function and how they are structured. Basically, communication on the Internet consists of a hardware layer (routers, modems,Fiber-optic cables, wireless adapters, satellites, etc.) and a software layer (the actual Internet services we use, such as Facebook, Skype, E-Mail, etc.). Initially, the Internet had been designed by its inventors as a decentralized, redundant network that is highly resistant against manipulation and disruption. However, today many aspects of the network both on the hardware and software layer are highly centralized and therefore easily controlled. For example, the reason why the Tunisian government succeeded in shutting down the country's Internet connectivity was that almost all of its connections were controlled byonly four major companies, which implemented the shutdown in a concerted action within only 15 minutes. (Ekaterina Stepanova, 2011) says in her report that social networking services such as Facebook or Twitter are centralized on the software layer, making it easy to monitor and manipulate all Communication that takes place on such

services. These patterns of centralization on the Internet have made it possible in the first place for authoritarian regimes to implement shutdowns and censorship and to usenew media to their advantage.

The Role of Facebook Twitter and YouTube

Facebook was a critical professional tool for all the journalists participating in the Needfinding, and is a universal part of Tunisians' digital engagement; more common that email. "Internet in Tunisia is pretty much Facebook," one interview subject claimed. Many journalists cited Facebook as a source of "preliminary" information from which to gather story ideas and build and understanding of the events and issues the population is interested in. For journalists, Facebook also operates as a form of CV – a mechanism through which they represent their professional selves. For instance, a profile picture is seen as part of a freelance journalist's CV; it enriches the public persona of the journalist which is important to their work. Equally important is their Facebook wall and the nature of information shared or permitted there. Many of the journalists mentioned building their professional networks using Facebook and using it to access contacts to verify stories, as well as receiving tips through Facebook messages from anonymous sources interested in making contact with a journalist (Phuse, 2015).

According to the wiki leaks founder about face book " Julian Assange called Facebook "more great spy tool in the history", which is already confirmed in an exclusive interview with RT.com many years ago, Google and Yahoo are also used for the spying purposes . The role of face book cannot be forgotten able in Arab revolution as the people share their views and do future planning(Mainwaring, 2011). In Tunisia, Facebook is more than a social platform, it is also political. Facebook was a key tool in coordinating the social action that led to the fall of the Ben Ali regime. It still serves as a platform for organizing and gathering people to "go to the streets," and in many ways it represents Tunisians strong desire for free sharing of information and connection with the outside world. The journalists clearly valued that ability to leverage Facebook as a tool for sharing their own stories. As Facebook is so widely used in Tunisia, there was much commentary throughout the Needfinding engagement about the importance of it in journalists' daily lives. As one journalist said, "Sometimes Facebook can decide your future". The role of face book and twitter are important because it helps to link of activists and opinion about leaders for ordinary citizens and to spread the rapid expansion of the network of people to take action. As Stowe Boyd writes" The Egypt learns from the Tunisia citizens of other.

Arab countries meet the challenge of determining it's for their future policy and military power. Social media do not have this happen, but allow man, faster connect to common values, it back to the people and the interests of a country values used, almighty power shifted to all its inhabitants. The peoples of Egypt say special thanks for Facebook, Simon Mainwaring (2011) writes in his report that when "Ideas spread more rapidly in densely connected social networks. So tools that increase the density of social connection are instrumental to the changes that spread. And, more Importantly, increased density of information flow (the number of times that people hear things) and of the emotional density (as individuals experience others' perceptions about events, or 'social

contextualization')leads to an increased likelihood of radicalization: when people decided to join the revolution instead of watching it". Democracy come is to parts of the Middle East and North Africa. What has the role of social media and the Internet in these uprising? Twitter fame has risen in the Arab world over the past year, a study published Thursday exposed, reflecting the major role of the social networking site in the "Arab Spring" revolutions. Online Twitter messages, or tweets, in Arabic rocketed from 99,000 a day in October 2010 to over two million last month, social media monitor Semi cast showed in its study into the most popular languages used on the popular site. Arabic is now the eighth most popular language on the micro blogging site, where users leave short messages of about 140 characters. Twitter, Facebook and other social networking sites were used to record the recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa and organize support. "With recent events, Twitter has grown extraordinarily fast in the Middle East(Available:http://www.fastcompany.com, 2011). Juan Mercado Philippine (2011) says that Majority of twitter user share this message through our entire world for Twitter user "My name is freedom. Born in Tunisia, raised in Egypt, studied in Yemen, fought inLibya and I'll grow up in the Arab world. AliTweel, Twitter".

The activist role of Mobile phones in Arab Spring

Mobile phones and new technology has played an inspiring and remarkable task in reaching and pursuing people internationally. Although talking about abrupt social change might be too optimistic and quite unworkable, it should be acknowledged that mobile telephony and the spread of the use of social media in socio-political related issues is giving the source for steady and long term social changes. Already people feel increasingly comfortable in taking action because of the power embedded in these tools. Distances have been reduced and times have been restrained. While arranging a revolution was involve years of personal and secret meeting on a small scale in the past, today events like those we have witnessed can be managed just in few days(Ghannam, 2011).

Short Message Service (SMS)

SMS played a central role in the creation of a "perfect storm" for the revolution which arose in the Arab world by 2011. Indeed, SMS is one of the fastest and easiest ways to communicate and this simple mechanism was a key driver in sweeping thoughts and communications in the Arab Spring across the Arab World(Yin, 2011). To understand how mobile technologies and social media influenced Arab spring, we will provide a simple comparative analysis of the completed revolutions and even errors highlighted the manner in which new technologies by local governments and protesters used. The Arab Spring gave dictators such as Mubarak and Ben Ali a hard lesson; that if you stop one method of communication, we may find other methods also. For example, Mubarak's interfering of the mobile phone networks in the preliminary stages of the public revolution in Egypt meant that he wasunintentionally sending out two signals. The first was that the mobile networks were important in the uprising and that SMS played an important tool in social mobilizing Egyptians. Secondly he also gave the green signal to demonstrators that electronic forms of communication were a key driver in mobilizing themasses. In doing so, the public were simply going to react to these measures by using Twitter and

Facebook. Despite them being less pervasive in Egypt than mobiles, these two alternative tools were fundamental in mobilizing the mass(Nikolov, The Role of Social Media in the Arab Spring Revolutions, 2012).

Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS)

The role of cell phone in Tunisia revelation in Tunisia and Egypt which could not be ignored or forgettable, the first step in revolution which took by cell phone SMS and MMS they shared the story of young Tunisian vendor his name Muhammad Bouazizi (Photographed below). Bouazizi was a 26-year-old fruitcart vendor in Tunisia whose goods were taken in custody and beaten badly for refusing to pay bribes to council inspectors. When the governor wouldn't listen to Bouazizi's case, the young man poured a can of petrol over himself and lit a match. His self-immolation triggered months of protests across Tunisia, Egypt,Libya, Syria, and Yemen and is credited for starting Arab Spring. The peoples of Tunisia share his picture through MMS and collect the peoples for protest (Sara Yin, 2011).

Conclusion

"Revelation" of Egypt, Tunisia and currently in Syria elsewhere in the Middle East strongly based on the Internet technologies and social media such as Twitter Twits Pictures, Facebook, and mobile phones, SMS, MMS, YouTube and Skype. The first step supports the social protest to accelerate the influence of Facebook and twitter in our social life keeps growing constantly. Recently, the communication of information has been vital to the success of the Tunisian, Egyptian and Syrian revolution, Twitter andFacebook was its main "accelerator ". This study examines the key reasons that explain Facebook's, twitter and YouTube contribution to this historical event, as perceived by Egyptian and Tunisian Internet users, Facebook, which, according to the Arab report on the social media has some 21 million people in the Middle East (with more than 5 million only in Egypt), is not particularly friendly protest platform. Social networking has changed expectations of freedom of expression and association to the degree that individual and collective capacities to communicate, mobilize and gain technical knowledge are expected to lead even greater voice, political influence and participation over the next 10 to 20 years. Regardless of the magnifying effect that social media gave to all that took place, the events were invariably based on a real-world fact which resounded in the virtual space. Media remained an invaluableorganizational tool during the protests for planning different uprisings. It was the platform where ideas were discussed, information was spread and through which public consciousness was elevated. It proves that modern technologies played a vital role in collecting people for protest on one place and can change gather the millions of protestors with wasting no time.

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