The Role of Social Media in the “Arab Spring” Democracy Revolutions

** CONTRAST WITH AMERICAN REVOLUTION – THOMAS PAYNE? DID THIS EXIST IN THE PAST?**

Quote From “Twitter Revolution: How the Arab Spring Was Helped By Social Media” By Saleem Kassim

Being capable of sharing an immense amount of uncensored and accurate information throughout social networking sites has contributed to the cause of many Arab Spring activists. Through social networking sites, Arab Spring activists have not only gained the power to overthrow powerful dictatorship, but also helped Arab civilians become aware of the underground communities that exist and are made up of their brothers, and others willing to listen to their stories.

In countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, rising action plans such as protests made up of thousands, have been organized through social media such Facebook and Twitter. “We use Facebook to schedule the protests” an Arab Spring activist from Egypt announced “and [we use] Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.” The role that technology has taken in allowing the distribution of public information such as the kinds stated by the aforementioned activist, had been essential in establishing the democratic movement that has helped guide abused civilians to overthrow their oppressor.

Social networks have broken the psychological barrier of fear by helping many to connect and share information. It has given most people in the Arab world the knowledge that they are not alone, that there are others experiencing just as much brutality, just as much hardships, just as much lack of justice. Social networks “for the first time provided activists with an opportunity to quickly disseminate information while bypassing government restrictions,” Hussein Amin, professor of mass communications at the American University in Cairo said.

An Academic Article on the Subject:
http://www.academia.edu/2370755/Explaining_the_role_and_impact_of_social_media_in_the_Arab_Spring_

**Explaining the Role and the Impact of the Social Media in the Arab Spring**

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Abstract

The paper examines how the efforts of ordinary people in the Arab “street” to move away with compliance and toleration from authoritarian regimes, also allowed them, once the opportunity arose, to invest in and use social media to change politics “from below”. This is not to argue that the social media were “responsible” for the uprisings. The uprisings were made by the people of the Arab countries, but the social media acted as a powerful accelerant facilitating the events in ways that were crucial. In particular, and with emphasis on Egypt, we examine: (a) the socioeconomic dynamics and human insecurity of the region and (b) the role of the social media prior and during the uprisings in empowering “social non-movements” and “leaderless networks”, and igniting public mobilization, enabling civic engagement and journalism, as well as collaboration between activists at regional and global level.
**New study quantifies use of social media in Arab Spring by Catherine O’Donnell, September 12, 2011**

In the 21st century, the revolution may not be televised – but it likely will be tweeted, blogged, texted and organized on Facebook, recent experience suggests.

After analyzing more than 3 million tweets, gigabytes of YouTube content and thousands of blog posts, a new study finds that social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring. Conversations about revolution often preceded major events, and social media has carried inspiring stories of protest across international borders.

“Our evidence suggests that social media carried a cascade of messages about freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East, and helped raise expectations for the success of political uprising,” said Philip Howard, the project lead and an associate professor in communication at the University of Washington. “People who shared interest in democracy built extensive social networks and organized political action. Social media became a critical part of the toolkit for greater freedom.”

During the week before Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak’s resignation, for example, the total rate of tweets from Egypt — and around the world — about political change in that country ballooned from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day. Videos featuring protest and political commentary went viral — the top 23 videos received nearly 5.5 million views. The amount of content produced online by opposition groups, in Facebook and political blogs, increased dramatically.

“Twitter offers us the clearest evidence of where individuals engaging in democratic conversations were located during the revolutions,” Howard said. Twitter provides a window into the broader world of digital conversations, many of which probably involved cell phones to send text, pictures or voice messages, he said. In Tunisia, for example, less than 20 percent of the population uses social media, but almost everyone has access to a mobile phone.

Data for the UW project came directly from immense digital archives the team built over the course of several months. The research is unusual because the team located data about technology use and political opinion from before the revolutions. The Project on Information Technology and Political Islam assembled data about blogging in Tunisia one month prior to the crisis in that country, and had special data on the link structure of Egyptian political parties one month prior to the crisis there.

Political discussion in blogs presaged the turn of popular opinion in both Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia, conversations about liberty, democracy and revolution on blogs and on Twitter often immediately preceded mass protests. Twenty percent of blogs were evaluating Ben Ali’s leadership the day he resigned from office (Jan. 14), up from just 5 percent the month before. Subsequently, the primary topic for Tunisian blogs was “revolution” until a public rally of at least 100,000 people eventually forced the old regimes remaining leaders to relinquish power.

In the case of both Tunisia’s and Egypt’s revolutions, discussion spanned borders. In the two weeks after Mubarak’s resignation, there was an average of 2,400 tweets a day from people in neighboring countries about the political situation in Egypt. In Tunisia after Ben Ali’s resignation, there were about 2,200 tweets a day.

“In other words,” Howard said, “people throughout the region were drawn into an extended conversation about social uprising. The success of demands for political change in Egypt and Tunisia led individuals in other countries to pick up the conversation. It helped create discussion across the region.”

Howard said that although social media did not cause the upheaval in North Africa, they altered the capacity of citizens to affect domestic politics. Online activists created a virtual ecology of civil society, debating contentious issues that could not be discussed in public.

Ironically, government efforts to crack down on social media may have incited more public activism, especially in Egypt. People who were isolated by efforts to shut down the Internet, mostly middle-class Egyptians, may have gone to the streets when they could no longer follow the unrest through social media, Howard said.
“Recent events show us that the public sense of shared grievance and potential for change can develop rapidly,” he said. “These dictators for a long time had many political enemies, but they were fragmented. So opponents used social media to identify goals, build solidarity and organize demonstrations.”

The Project on Information Technology and Political Islam is supported by the National Science Foundation and the George W. Bush Institute. Download the full report at http://pitpi.org/?p=1051.

Looking to the Future? Is this Even More Important?

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/social-media-arab-spring/

Social Media Can Help Build Arab Governments Too

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In the Arab world this winter, social media proved that it can facilitate rebellion and even topple regimes. Now it faces a much harder challenge. Can social media help to build new governments?

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