

ECPR General Conference 2014, Glasgow

Campaigning with Twitter in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

Twitter, Social Networking and Political Representation and Remediation

1. Introduction: Remediating and institutionalising the revolutionary counter-discourse

Studies investigating the role of social media in the 2011 Arab uprisings demonstrated that the contribution of Twitter or Facebook in facilitating the Egyptian and Tunisian protests was often overestimated. As it appears, cyber-activism has mainly played a role in assisting the logistics of the revolutionary protests and drawing the attention of the international community. The application of digital technologies should be considered in relation with a broader-spectrum of political action. Furthermore, beyond the question of social media application in the context of the Arab revolutions, a recent tradition of postcolonial critique raised its voice against technological determinism (Allagui and Kuebler, 2011; Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Sarquis, 2012). According to this critical literature, conceptualising technology as a major factor of democratisation in the Middle East generates a distorted and Eurocentric understanding of Arab societies and their political evolution. Consequently, analysing the application of social media in the region requires being fully aware of the multitude of parameters interfering with digital media usage.

Although researchers have examined the function of social media and the Internet in the context of the 2011 revolutionary uprisings, very few studies have been conducted to evaluate their impact in post-revolutionary politics. Yet, investigating the use of participative media in post-revolutionary Egypt reveals how political institutions responded to the debate initiated by citizens and relayed by activists. This alternative approach shows how political leaders addressed the revolutionary claims, which emanated from the people, in the process of establishing the new government.

In doing so, it shows how the revolutionary opposition acquired legitimacy against competing political groups. Studying participatory media precisely outlines the level of reciprocity, interactivity and *remediation* occurring between the mainstream and the grass-root political discourses. For that purpose, this paper will compare the application of Twitter with a broader set of online and offline media, which contributed to cover the 2012 presidential election in Egypt.

In this particular context, I will broadly refer to participatory media – or citizen media¹ – as a set of political discourses emanating from individual citizens and progressively reaching the public sphere. These bottom-up communication flows distinguish themselves from state-controlled (mainstream) media, as they provide grass-root opposition movements with the opportunity to be heard. However, they might as well manifest themselves as a combination of online and offline practices (Gerbaudo, 2012). Drawing on this distinction, social scientists recently postulated that digital technologies have introduced more flexible forms of political engagement, that are less constrained to ideological frameworks and institutional discourses (Bennett and Segerberg, 2014).

¹ <http://citizenmediamanchester.wordpress.com/>

This paper precisely examines whether participatory media are more representative of the grass-root counter-discourse in the case of the first Egyptian presidential election held after the revolution. By examining the use of Twitter during the 2012 Egyptian presidential campaign, it argues that participatory media conveyed the institutional discourse of some dominant political groups, as well as the voice of the grass-root opposition. However, whether political groups applied this social media to further establish their visibility, representatives of the revolutionary counter-discourse used it to express their personal views on controversial issues. This leads to think that participative media does not exclusively act as an alternative to traditional and institutionalised forms of political action. Rather, it might be employed by political institutions to gain credibility among citizens, as well as by communities of private individuals, who gather sporadically to gain influence on their governments.

2. Methods: mapping the visibility of presidential candidates online

Drawing on the data collected from the R-Shief² open-source database, I will comment on the popularity of the 2012 leading presidential candidates, by assessing the frequency of five trending hashtags in the days that preceded the election (round 1).

I will then discuss these findings in relation to a study I conducted as part of a project on ESRC Google Data Analytics Programme³. This project examined Egyptian voters' use of the search engine Google over the course of the presidential campaign and discussed a set of data collected from the application Google Trend. This methodological tool enables to visualize fluctuations of searches computed by Google users and allows us to compare the popularity of up to five different search terms over a definite period of time. In the context of the 2012 Egyptian elections, the data collected from Google Trends provide us with additional findings with regards to the visibility of presidential candidates online. As I will show, these results corroborate our interpretation of Twitter popular trends and hashtags, illustrating which political actors benefitted from the bottom-up communication flows generated by internet and digital devices.

I will briefly compare candidates' visibility in the press, by examining a sample of the Egyptian press, employing the NexisLexis database. Finally, I will conduct a discourse and thematic analysis of tweets posted by candidates Ahmad Shafiq and Hamdeen Sabahy, who proved to be active Twitter users.

² <http://r-shief.org/>

³ www.voterecology.com

3. Introducing the first post-revolutionary presidential election in Egypt:

Following the roadmap and the electoral laws promulgated by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the 2012 presidential campaign took place between the 23rd-24th May (round 1) and 16th-17th June 2012 (round 2). The Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission (SPEC) proceeded to candidates' registration between March and April 2012 and disqualified ten potential candidates before issuing the names of those officially running for presidency. Among the thirteen candidates competing in the race, the five leaders Abdel Moneim Abu al Futuh, Ahmed Shafiq, Amru Mussa, Hamdeen Sabahy and Mohammed Morsi shared more than 90% of the votes. Commentators stated that the victory of Ahmad Shafiq and Mohammed Morsi in the first round of the election illustrated the polarisation of the Egyptian political environment and the leadership of two dominant groups: traditionalists and the military elites.

Figure 1

Leading candidates	Suffrage	Affiliations	Ideology
Mohammed Morsi	24.78%	Freedom and Justice Party	Muslim Brotherhood
Ahmad Shafiq	23.66%	Independent	Military
Hamdeen Sabahy	20.72%	Independent (founder of the Karama party)	Socialist, Nasserite
Abdel Moneim Abu al Futuh	17.47%	Independent (former member of the Muslim Brotherhood)	Moderate traditionalist
Amru Mussa	11.13%	Independent	Liberal

4. Democratising the political debate or institutionalising the revolutionary discourse

Among the debates surrounding the 2011-2012 post-revolutionary crises in Egypt, the 2012 presidential campaign can be considered as a shifting point. Following the parliamentary election, the presidential race appeared as the opportunity for parties and political leaders to reclaim influence over the public sphere, by framing public discourse, partly shaping the *agenda setting* and drawing attention to their own political agenda.

This aspect of the campaign had already been discussed in a case study I provided for the ESRC cross-country comparative research "Google: The Role of Internet Search in Elections in Established and Challenged Democracies" (2013)⁴. By comparing a set of search keywords computed on Google by

⁴ This study explores Internet users' application of search engine Google in periods of elections and to identify search keywords likely to reveal which aspects of the campaign had successfully

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Egyptian citizens, this study demonstrated how traditional political leaders and figures of the revolutionary opposition successively dominated the public debate. More specifically, it revealed that official leaders and alternative political stakeholders stimulated citizens' interests at different moments of the 2011-2012 Egyptian crisis, highlighting a shift at the period of the presidential election.

Figure 2

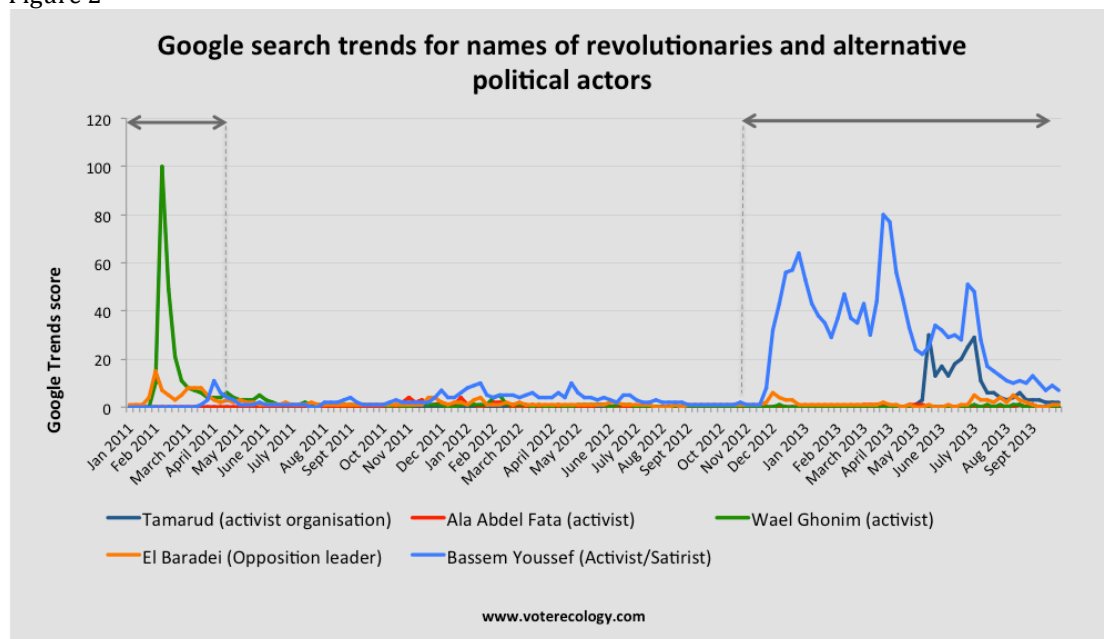
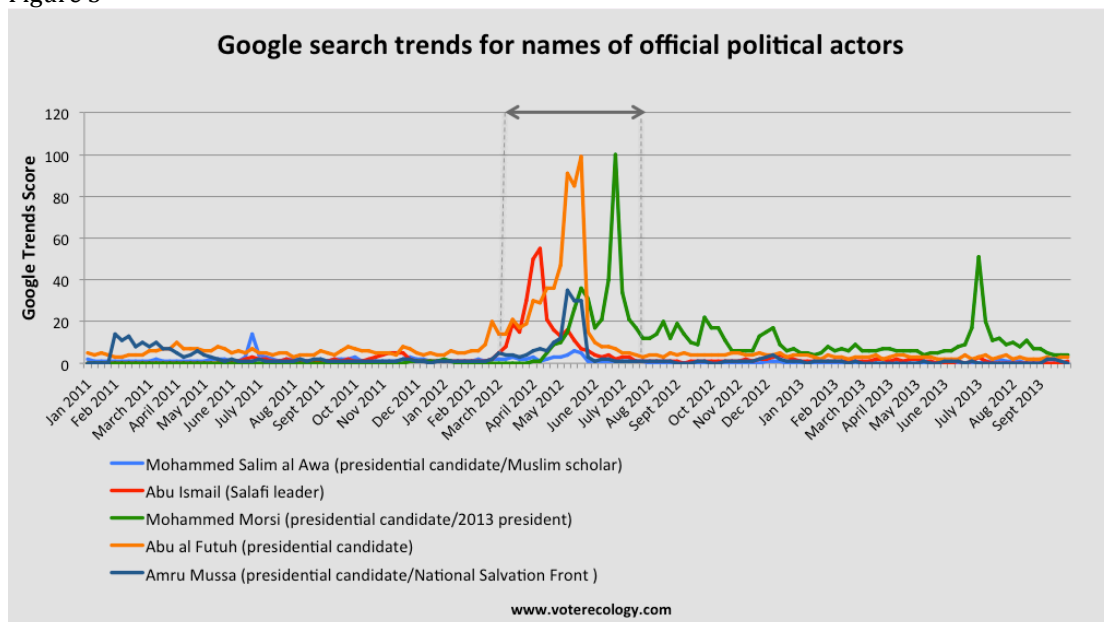


Figure 3



stimulated citizens' interest. Fluctuations of search volumes for specific key words were visualised and analysed by using the Google application "Google Trends".

Yet beyond acknowledging the fact that the 2012 presidential debate has been a tipping point in the struggles between *discourse* and *counter-discourse*, it is useful to highlight how these different discursive environments operate together.

This is precisely to identify the boundaries between institutional (top-down) and alternative (bottom-up) forms of politics, across the post-revolutionary debate. To this end, this paper explores how political officials might utilise interactive platforms such as Twitter to respond to the claims of revolutionaries. In this regard, it assesses to what extent the values and ideals of the revolution are sometimes incorporated by officials and political leaders to increase their popularity and win over the opposition. I will refer to this as a *remediation* process, through which the revolutionary counter-discourse is progressively distorted to benefit dominant political institutions.

5. Demystifying the role of Twitter and social media in the Egyptian revolution:

According to a report published by Dubai School of Government (Salem and Mourtada, 2011), Egypt was among the top five Arab countries in terms of the number of Twitter users, along with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait. However, Egypt's Twitter penetration appears to be considerably low, with a 0.15 average penetration rate between January and March 2011:

Egypt particularly stands out, with one of the lowest Twitter user penetration rates in the region, especially given that the country has close to 7 million Facebook users and 17-18 million Internet users. There are two possible reasons for this. The first is that the distribution of Twitter users in Egypt is primarily concentrated in Cairo (51% of Twitter users), followed by Alexandria (8% of Twitter users) (...) This concentration of Twitter users in Cairo indicates that Twitter usage has not really caught on outside the capital. The second possible factor could be that Twitter has not yet offered an Arabic interface (initially scheduled for the first quarter of 2011). (Salem and Mourtada, 2011, p.24)

Egyptian Twitter users, however, do appear to be active in commenting on the political crisis. For example, #egypt and #jan25 referring to the Egyptian revolution prove to be the most popular trending hashtags across the Arab region (Salim and Mourtada, 2011, p.16). Additionally, the same study revealed that a higher volume of tweets was published in periods of political crisis or significant political events (2011, p.20).

Despite the low penetration rate of some social platforms and the issue of digital divide, we might expect that citizen journalism and cyber-activism – in combination with offline forms of activism – might have a specific function in post-revolutionary Egyptian politics. Indeed, such participatory media enabled citizens to comment on a broader spectrum of controversial issues, in the context of the country's State-controlled media. Presumably, their influence lies in the fact that they contribute to shape dominant political discourse rather than in the number of citizens that constitute their audience.

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This is the reason why the role of Twitter in the 2012 presidential debate should be analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Although this social media was only applied by a minority of the Egyptian population, it potentially conveyed the narratives and ideological tensions that surrounded the election.

6. Egyptian Twitter users and 2012 presidential race:

Figure 4

Candidates	#hashtag	Tweets archived in the R-Shief data base			
		Number of tweets	days collected	Start date	End date
Abu al Futuh	#ابوالفتوح	81991	423	14.04.12	11.06.13
	#حمدين	141342	395	12.05.12	06.11.13
Hamdeen Sabahy	#صباحي	113630	396	11.05.12	11.06.13
	#مورسي	3157356	396	11.05.12	11.06.13
Mohammed Morsi	#مورسي-الاستين	2447	422	15.04.12	11.06.13
Amru Mussa	#موسى	49259	396	11.05.12	11.06.13
Ahmad Shafiq	#شفيق	703354	341	01.05.12	07.04.13

R-Shief is an open-source project, which provides free access to a database of tweets posted in English and Arabic between 2008 and 2013. The website is also developing a set of data visualisation tools designed to conduct social media analysis in Arabic. The table above lists all hashtags mentioning the five leading candidates, which have been archived in the R-Shief database. As it appears, two sets of hashtags respectively refer to candidates Hamdeen Sabahy and Mohammed Morsi. Given that the first date of the archive vary depending on Twitter hashtag, I considered variations of tweets between 11th and 24th May 2012, so as to compare all tags listed in the table above.

Figure 5

Tweets mentioning the five leading candidates between 11.05.2012 and 24.05.2012										
Trending hashtags referring to candidates	Hamdeen Sabahy	#حمدين صباحي	Ahmad Shafiq	#شفيق	Mohammed Morsi	#مورسي-الاستين	Amru Mussa	#موسى	Abdel Moneim Abu al Futuh	#ابوالفتوح
Minimum amount of tweets in a day	466		2,395		74		611		851	
Maximum amount of tweets in a day	10,085		15,492		8,484		4,181		4,529	
Total amount of tweets	38,080		94,669		33,179		19,589		32,287	
Average of tweets	2,720		6,762		2,370		1,399		2,306	

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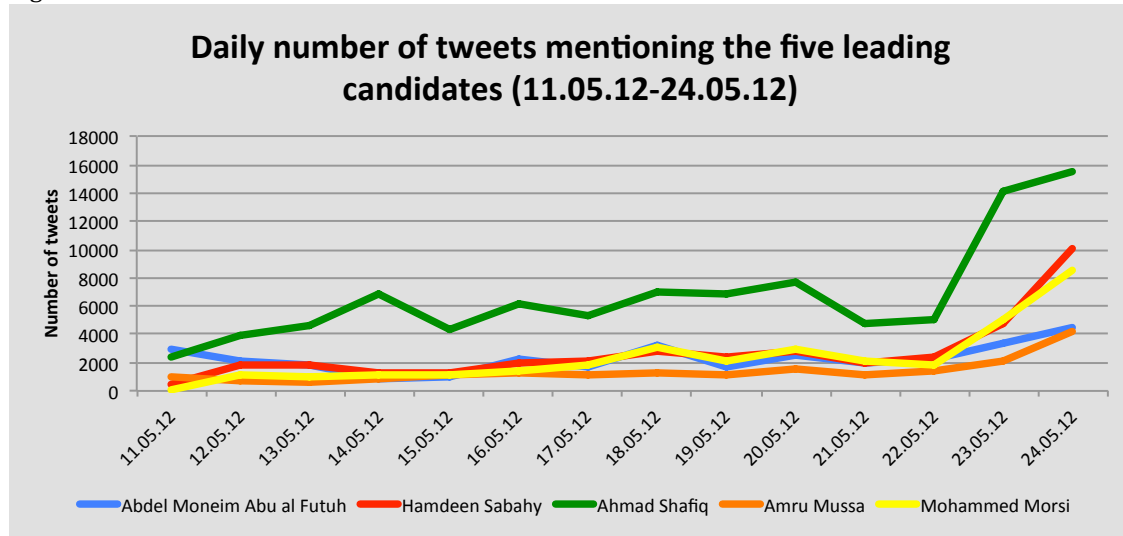
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The sample collected indicated that Ahmad Shafiq gained more visibility on Twitter than their opponents, with a significantly higher average and total amount of tweets. Additionally, as it appears on the graph below, the number of tweets referring to Mohammed Morsi and Hamdeen Sabahy considerably increased during the three days that preceded the election.

However, despite the success of Mohammed Morsi's campaign, the name of Hamdeen Sabahy slightly prevails among the community of Twitter users.

Finally, the data exported from R-Shief revealed a decrease of tweets in relation to candidate Abu al Futuh, which correlates with the date of the presidential TV debate, featuring Abu al Futuh and Amru Mussa, on 10th May 2012. These findings coincide with Laila Shareen Sakr's study (2012)⁵, which applies R-Shief sentiment analysis' tools to investigate a broader set of hashtags reporting the 2012 campaign. Among all Twitter occurrences found for the names of the presidential candidates, this computerised sentiment analysis identified the tweets, in which political leaders were referred to in positive terms. Whereas the number of occurrences associated with the name of a candidate highlights his visibility on Twitter, the percentage of positive sentiment indicates the quality his reputation.

Figure 6



In this case, the sentiment analysis computed by Sakr (2012) demonstrated that candidates Hamdeen Sabahy, Mohammed Morsi and Khaled Ali reached a higher percentage of positive sentiment associated with their names than Ahmad Shafiq. However, the number of occurrences for the name of Ahmad Shafiq was considerably higher than for the names of his opponents.

⁵ Shereen Sakr L (2012) Egypt's Presidential Elections and Twitter Talk. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5716/egypts-presidential-elections-and-twitter-talk> [Accessed: 28.07.2014]

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Mentions of Ahmad Shafiq represented 41.51% of the sample, whereas other candidates were referred to by approximately 7% to 13% of the tweets included in this dataset. This undeniably leads to think that Shafiq's campaign was significantly more visible on Twitter.

Figure 7

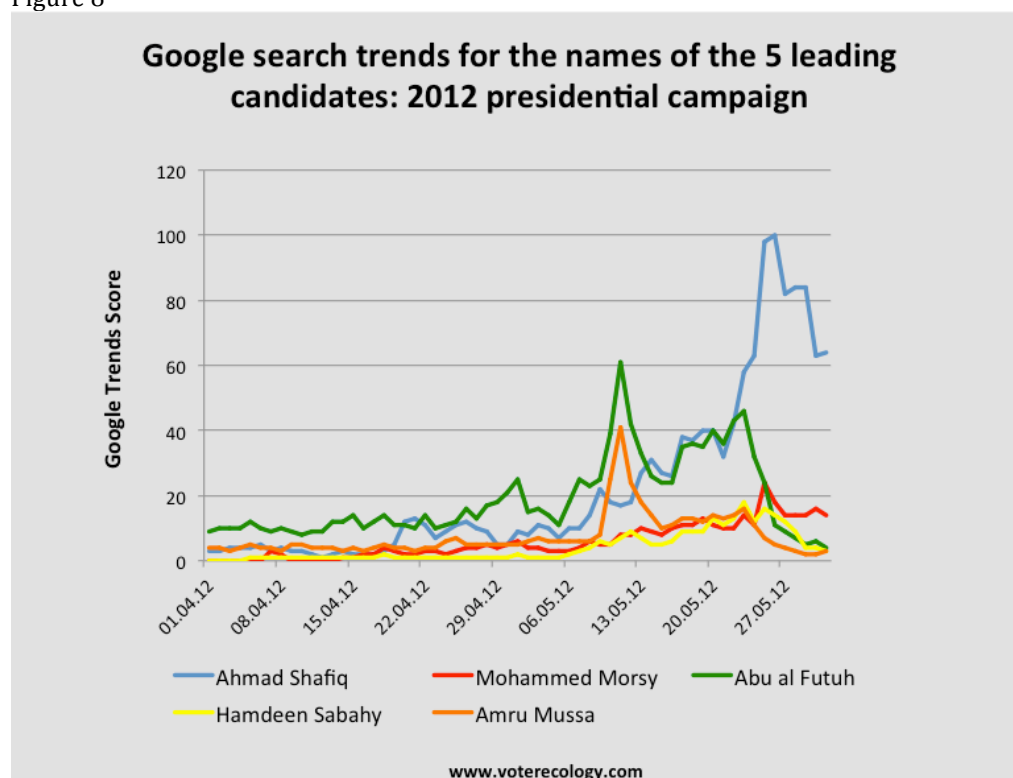
Sentiment Analysis conducted on a sample of Arabic Hashtags covering the campaign (May 2012) (Laila Shereen Sakr, 2012)						
Arabic hashtags for names of candidates	<i>Shafiq</i> [Ahmad Shafiq]	<i>Hamdeen</i> [Hamdeen Sabahy]	<i>AbouFotouh</i> [Abu al Moneim Abu al Futuh]	<i>Moussa</i> [Amru Mussa]	<i>Morsi</i> [Mohammed Morsi]	<i>KhaledAli</i> [Khaled Ali]
Percentage of positive sentiment	77.66%	84.84%	72.6%	69.05%	99.83%	93.49%
Percentage of the sample	41.51%	11.4%	13.53%	8.53%	11.74%	7.34%
Daily Tweet Volume	7460	3912	2457	2978	3128	1171
Votes – election round 1	23.66%	20.72%	17.47%	11.13%	24.78%	0.58%

Source: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5716/egypts-presidential-elections-and-twitter-talk>

7. Candidates' visibility across the media: Google searches and the Egyptian press

Given Twitter's relatively low penetration rate, these findings should be discussed by examining candidates' visibility across different communication channels. In this regard, the study I provided for the ESRC comparative research project (above) contributes to conceptualising Twitter as part of wider media ecology. For the purpose of this study, I employed the application "Google Trends" to compare frequencies of searches computed by Egyptian Google users for the names of the five leading candidates and over the period of the 2012 election campaign. Similarly to Shareen Sakr's (2012) study, this research revealed that candidate Ahmad Shafiq stimulated a constant increase of interest among the community of Egyptian Google users, which was not the case of Mohammed Morsi. This suggests that the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood was not as visible online during the first round of the presidential race.

Figure 8



Twitter campaigning strategies can also be examined in the context of the wider media ecology, and specifically in relation to mainstream media. For that purpose, I identified occurrences for the names of the five leading candidates across a selection of Egyptian news articles archived on the NexisLexis database⁶. As it appears in the table below, the amount of references listed illustrates the success of Ahmad Shafiq and Mohammed Morsi in the first round of the election. But most importantly, this indicates that candidate Morsi was more visible offline and that his campaign was actively relayed by the press.

Figure 9

Visibility of political leaders in the Egyptian Press 1 March-22 May 2012 (first round of presidential campaign)		
<i>Names</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	<i>% Occurrences among political leaders considered</i>
"Ahmad Shafiq"	550	24.8
"Mohammed Morsi"	506	22.8
"Hamdeen Sabahy"	279	12.6
"Abu al Futuh"	493	22.2
"Amru Mussa"	213	9.6
"Hazem Salah Abu Ismail"	177	8

Data collected from a selection of 37 Egyptian periodic newspapers archived in the NexisLexis database

⁶ The selection included 37 Egyptian newspapers dedicated to general and political news. Among the sources selected and available on the NexisLexis database, five newspapers proved to have constantly reported the campaign: Al Messa (Arabic), Al-Ahram, Al-Ahram Gate (Arabic), Al Gomhurriah (Arabic).

8. Candidates campaigning on Twitter:

Figure 10

Candidate	Twitter account	Date of first tweet	Number of tweets*	Daily tweet average*	Number of days**	Number of Tweets posted**	Daily tweet average**
Ahmad Shafiq	AhmadShafikEG	18.05.12	93	10.24	36	93	2.58
Amru Mussa	moussacampaign	25.06.11	205	22.58	334	606	1.81
Hamdeen Sabahy	HamdeenSabahy	08.06.10	39	4.29	716	240	0.34
Abu al Futuh	MaadiCampaign	05.04.12	150	16.52	49	150	3.06

*During first round of the presidential campaign (01.04.12-23.05.12)
**Between the date of the first tweet and round 1 of the election (23.05.2012)

Besides quantifying candidates' visibility and popularity among Twitter users, it is worth examining how political leaders attempted to use this medium to promote their political programme. For this purpose, I conducted a discourse and thematic analysis of a sample of tweets posted on candidates' official Twitter accounts.

As it appears on the table above, only four of the five leading candidates had been actively campaigning on Twitter over the months that preceded the first round of the presidential race. No official Twitter account was administered on behalf of Mohammed Morsi prior to his election in June 2012. This can partly be explained by the fact that, as the representative of the Muslim Brotherhood, his campaign was already successfully relayed online and offline by the Freedom and Justice party. Whereas Morsi benefitted from the profile afforded by the network and infrastructure of his party, independent candidates were reliant to a greater extent on social media's facilitation of more direct engagement with their potential electorate.

Among the four Twitter accounts included in our sample, *moussacampaign* and *MaadiCampaign* produced a larger amount of tweets between April and May 2012. Furthermore, Amru Mussa's Twitter campaign had generated the highest number of tweets since its creation in June 2011. However, these social media profiles essentially highlighted public events and directed the audience to additional sources of information, by providing links to news articles, YouTube footage and Facebook pages. In this regard, they had not been primarily used to develop personalised interactions between candidates and their audience.

Figure 11

Candidates	Twitter accounts excluded from data sample	
	Twitter accounts	Irrelevancy
Abdel Moneim Abu al Futuh	DrAbolftoh_alex	Administered by supporters from Alexandria
Abdel Moneim Abu al Futuh	DrAbolfotoh	Only active after the presidential election
Mohammed Morsi	MorsiMorsy	Only active after the presidential election
Mohammed Morsi	Morse_egy	Only active after the presidential election
Amru Mussa	AmreMoussaPR	Only active after the presidential election
Amru Mussa	Amroomoosa	Unofficial account
Hamdeen Sabahy	SabahyCampaign	Only active after the presidential election
Hamdeen Sabahy	hamdinsabahy	Only active on 21.08.2011 Limited amount of tweets

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Alternatively, Ahmad Shafiq and Hamdeen Sabahy's tweets emphasised the candidates' personal statements, reporting their campaign from a more individual perspective. Unlike their opponents, the two candidates expressed a rather personal voice, as they engaged in Twitter participatory debate. Hamdeen Sabahy consistently applied the first person in his tweets. This was not always the case for the *AhmadShafikEG* account, which mostly quoted statements from Ahmad Shafiq's public speeches and interviews.

From this it seems that Shafiq and Sabahy developed a particular *Twitter communication strategy*. From the perspective of the relationship between official political stakeholders and revolutionaries, leaders appeared to be assessed with regards to their ability to engage in more conversational or at least personable debate.

Arguably, interacting through social media placed them in amongst bloggers, citizen journalists and independent social media users, who contributed to a plurality of political voices. And this also afforded a degree of credibility and legitimacy, at least in the context of a widely mistrusted state-control media and an actively used social media to consolidate opposition movements.

9. Mapping Ahmad Shafiq's ideological discourse from Twitter

Among the 93 tweets produced by AhmadShafikEG, many statements extracted from presidential rally events promoted the inclusion and representativeness of women and the Christian minority into the future Egyptian government. This confirms a hypothesis formulated by local citizen journalists⁷ according to which Ahmad Shafiq had been strategically portrayed as an alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, by advocating the integration of religious minorities as well as women's political involvement, the candidate positioned himself along opposite ideological lines to the Muslim Brotherhood. In this regard, his Twitter campaign emphasised his engagement against sectarianism, by reporting his participation to the conference entitled "Egyptian Women and the President", which was organised by the National Council for Women on the 19th May 2012. Additionally, Shafiq's Twitter campaign covered his visits to Coptic churches in Egyptian provinces.

Another aspect of Ahmad Shafiq's political discourse and electoral programme, which was highlighted by his Twitter campaign, lies in the argument of national security. As the candidate of the counter-revolution, Ahmad Shafiq promoted himself as the only potential president able to restore political stability. This distinguished him from Abu al Futuh, and Hamdeen Sabahy, who publically contested the authority of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF).

⁷ The Big Pharaoh (22.05.2012) Who's Who in Egypt's Presidential Elections, <http://www.bigpharaoh.org/2012/05/22/whos-who-in-egypts-presidential-elections/> [Accessed 29.07.2014]

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Unlike his opponents, Ahmad Shafiq called for citizens' trust in the military council and argued that the SCAF's involvement in electoral regulations and infrastructure would not affect the democratic process. Admittedly, this argument – along with his military career and involvement in Mubarak's former administration - characterised him as the partisan of the military regime. Therefore, it is very unlikely that this particular aspect of his discourse contributed to convince the Egyptian voters, who celebrated the removal of Mubarak's dictatorship. However, a closer analysis of the campaign indicates that Ahmad Shafiq's position was advertised as an opportunity to restore stable political institutions and national security. Whereas candidates Sabahy, Abu al Futuh and Mohammed Morsi agreed on the need to review the peace treaty with Israel, Shafiq's Twitter campaign reported his visit to Nag Hammadi – in which several Copts were massacred on 7th January 2010- advocating peaceful and strategic relationships with the United States, neighbouring Arab countries and the gulf region. In this case again, his political programme differentiated him from the revolutionaries and the Muslim Brotherhood, from which Egyptian citizens expected a renegotiation of political alliances.

These fundamental elements of Ahmad Shafiq's discourse show through his use of Twitter during the presidential race, evidencing an efficient and successful *Twitter communication strategy*. Not only did the social media cover daily official visits and presidential rally events of the campaign, but it also provided the audience with an overview of the candidate's electoral programme. Indeed, after addressing issues of gender equity and women's right, AhmadShafikEg reported Shafiq's economical plan in response to youth unemployment and industrial development. Tweets posted between the 20th and 23rd May referred to his projects of industrialisation of the Suez canal region and his intention of democratising education and supporting young entrepreneurs, creating more professional perspectives for the post-Mubarak generation.

Simultaneously, despite his attempt at restoring trust in the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, Shafiq expressed his will to establish an office in charge of monitoring corruption as well as an office for democratic development. By addressing the topics of corruption, democratic development and youth unemployment on Twitter and by highlighting them as a major part of his political programme, Shafiq responded to some of the most consistent demands raised by revolutionaries.

Therefore, although he distinguished himself as the candidate of the counter-revolution and despite his partnership with the military council, Ahmad Shafiq's *discourse* reflected the *counter-discourse* produced by young liberals and revolutionaries. Egyptian citizen-journalists, who reported and deconstructed candidates' campaign in relation to the revolutionaries' agenda, offered different interpretations to the success of Shafiq's campaign, highlighting the fact that he benefitted from more financial resources as his opponents. Another argument precisely lies in Shafiq's ability to answer to liberals' concerns regarding the potential leadership of religious parties and to mirror revolutionaries' demands. However, this discursive strategy stands out from our Twitter dataset, inasmuch as it characterises Ahmad Shafiq's entire campaign. In this regard, the *AhmadShafikEg* Twitter account was used to amplify a discourse that had been initially framed by campaigners, rather than as a complementary and straightforward communication channel between the candidate and his electorate.

10. Mapping Hamdeen Sabahy's Twitter discourse

In contrast,, Hamdeen Sabahy's tweets offered complementary statements and provided his followers with exclusive reactions to everyday news. Unlike his opponents, Hamdeen Sabahy did not use Twitter to report the highlights of his presidential campaign, but positioned himself amongst regular Twitter users by posting personalised comments on the most topical issues. On the 10th April 2012, Sabahy expressed his supports to the workers, who protested on April 2nd in front of the State Council to contest the government's decision to regain the companies of *Ghazl Shebeen*, *Tanta for Linen*, *El Nasr for Steam Boilers* and *El-Nil for cotton Ginning* to the public sector. On the 11th April 2012, Sabahy paid tribute to the Algerian revolutionary socialist Ahmad Ben Bella, who died on the same date, referring to him as a leading figure of the mobilisation for freedom and social equity. On the 19th April, the candidate reacted to the controversy of Sheikh Ali Goma's controversial visit to the Al-Asqa Mosque in support of the Muslim community of Jerusalem, calling for the resignation of the Al-Azhar scholar. On the 20th April 2012, he expressed his condolences to candidate Ahmad Shafiq for the loss of his wife. On the 22nd April and 4th May, he contested the arrest of the Egyptian citizen Ahmed Al-Gizawy in Saudi Arabia, which had led to several protests in Cairo. On the 7th May, Hamdeen Sabahy mentions the election of the leftist candidate François Hollande, celebrating the success of left-wing movements over the world. Finally, on the 15th May 2012, he refers to the death of former Egyptian Prime Minister and member Gamal Abdel Nasser's administration Zakaria Mohieddin.

By shaping his postings more immediately around everyday news, Hamdeen Sabahy affords a certain currency to his political message, adopting the same perspective as his audience, whilst at the same time framing the news in accordance with his ideological views. Additionally to this set of topical issues, he regularly recalls the martyrs of the revolution and expresses his supports to young revolutionaries as they demonstrate in front of the Ministry of Defence.

Sabahy calls for the right of the revolutionary youth to protest peacefully, naming military authorities responsible for their safety. Furthermore, he states his uncertainties regarding the impartiality of media covering the election campaign, which coincides with one of the most important criticisms of the revolutionary opposition.

11. Sabahy Twitter campaign from the perspective of the broader revolutionary discourse

Finally, with regards to the way candidates' discourse – and ideological positions - took shape online, it is worth referring to the way activists and revolutionaries reacted towards the presidential debate. Indeed, this helps understand the process through which the counter-discourse of the revolution is potentially remediated by political institutions, in the process of establishing a new government. Furthermore, this reminds us that Twitter and other social media were originally used by the revolutionary community. Consequently, to a large extent, interacting with Egyptian social media users inevitably involves responding to the claims that had been raised by all the different categories of the revolutionary movement (conservative, liberal, left-wing). For that matter, I shall refer to the critical discourse analysis I conducted as part of my PhD research, in which I analysed a hundred Egyptian blog articles published between the 2011 uprisings and the 2013 coup d'état. My analysis of this corpus demonstrates that, despite the outcome of the election, bloggers and activists, who relayed the opinion of the working class and the liberal youth expressed a lot of support to Hamdeen Sabahy. Also, Abdel Moneim Abu al Futuh was also praised for his attempt at reconciling liberals and conservatives.

But most importantly, revolutionaries appeared to have been very critical about the way military supporters, members of the counter-revolution and Islamist parties distorted the revolutionary discourse. Activists argued that these dominant political groups only addressed the issues of insecurity, unemployment, sectarianism and social inequalities to serve their own political interests, while discrediting the revolutionary opposition. By doing so, they denounced what they perceived as an exploitation of the revolutionary mobilisation by elites and dominant institutions.

Analysing this sample of tweets in relation with my dataset extracted from the Egyptian blogosphere, underlines the fact that Hamdeen Sabahy's Twitter campaign matches the most predominant issues raised by liberal and left wing revolutionaries. Indeed, a discourse analysis conducted on this sample of blog articles published between January 2011 and August 2013 indicated that activist bloggers and citizen journalists consistently addressed:

- The involvement of the SCAF in the electoral process and elections regulations.
- The partiality of the media, when covering the parliamentary, presidential and constitutional debate.
- The distortion of revolutionaries counter-discourse by military authorities and members of the counter-revolution.

- The need to recall the memory of the young martyrs of the revolution to contest abuses of power, repression and social inequalities

For that matter, Hamdeen Sabahy does not only formulate the same criticism as revolutionaries, but genuinely employs social media as an alternative news channel, reframing the discourse of the media from the perspective of the revolutionaries' agenda. Along with the fact that his application of social media preceded the 2011 uprisings as well as the presidential elections, this reveals that Sabahy is aligned with the revolutionary opposition. Unlike his opponent Ahmad Shafiq and most of the political leaders involved in the presidential debates, Sabahy does not use Twitter to build a new institutional discourse, but rather as a way to provide an alternative political voice.

12. Conclusion:

In conclusion, our quantitative and qualitative analyses both demonstrated that, among the top five candidates, Ahmad Shafiq and Hamdeen Sabahy developed a successful Twitter campaign. The sample of tweets collected from the R-Shief database suggests that the two candidates have been the subjects of a significantly larger number of tweets than their opponents. Furthermore, the variations of tweets mentioning the names of the five political leaders and the sentiment analyses computed by Laila Shereen Sakr (2012) both suggest that Mohammed Morsi's Twitter popularity also increased in the days that preceded the election.

However, the former Egyptian president did not reach as much Twitter visibility as candidates Shafiq and Sabahy, which is presumably due to the fact that Morsi's campaign did not primarily rely on social media and digital communication tools. Visualising the evolution of Google searches for the names of the candidates confirms this hypothesis, as Mohammed Morsi did not stimulate as much searches as Ahmad Shafiq. On the other hand, the sample of Egyptian news articles collected from our Nexis Lexis sample included a large number of references to the representative of the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, the success of Mohammed Morsi's campaign could be explained by his exposure in the press and in a broader set of offline mainstream media.

Most importantly, the prevalence of Ahmad Shafiq and Hamdeen Sabahy across Arabic tweets is the result of their contribution to the debates that arose on social media. One could argue that their engagement on social media demonstrates a desire to interact with a specific demographic. Indeed, this gave them access to an audience that had already expressed its criticism online, through the revolutionary process. It is precisely the reason why their tweets are formulated as an attempt to respond to the revolutionary claims.

However, from a discursive as much as from an ideological perspective, Shafiq and Sabahy appear to be very different. Although Ahmad Shafiq addresses the issues of sectarianism or women's rights, his *Twitter discourse* remains much more embedded in more traditional institutional politics.

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Indeed, most of his tweets are quoted from his public speeches or journalistic interviews, suggesting that his Twitter campaign only relayed the traditional (top-down) communication channels. For that matter, one can see how liberals would essentially identify with Ahmad Shafiq's political programme, as an alternative to traditionalist movements. On the contrary, Hamdeen Sabahy's tweets did not only resonate with some of the revolutionary demands, but also proved to have the same discursive features. Indeed, Sabahy employed Twitter in the mode of activist or citizen journalist, providing a different spin on everyday news. His *Twitter discourse* offered exclusive information and a rather critical perspective on mainstream media, which positioned him on the same level as the activist youth.

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