

**Arab 2.0 Revolutions: Investigating Social Media Networks
during waves of the Egyptian political uprisings that occur
between 2011, 2012 and 2013.**

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ABSTRACT

Social media networks were at the centre of the dramatic events in 2011 events widely referred to as ‘the Arab Spring’ uprising or revolution. This thesis investigates the role of social media networks (such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) in facilitating political mobilisation and the creation of a new Arab public sphere. The thesis asks whether the Arab Spring revolutions would have even happened in the absence of social media networks. The analysis will focus specifically on Egypt and how these networks acted as a catalyst and tool for mobilisation and how they shifted the balance of power between civilian activists and the authoritarian regime in the uprisings that occurred in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

The primary research data reveals that social media networks have gone through four distinct phases: outrage and hope, instability and distrust, disinformation and criticism, and antagonism and hate. As these phases have been enacted during the three waves of social unrest in Egypt, networks have become a key player in generating and shifting power.

This thesis draws on network theories of communication such as ‘the strength of weak ties’ (Granovetter 1973) and ‘communication power’ (Castells 2009). Castells proposes that social networks can be sites of ‘outrage and hope’ (2012) but in this thesis I argue that social media has developed into ‘networks of antagonism and hate’. This argument is made after an empirical analysis of the Facebook data sets of the liberals and Islamists which shows they have become sites of clashing ideologies. This thesis will also highlight the role other media played in the uprisings, such as Arab satellite channels such as Aljazeera, Hacktivists groups such as Anonymous and Telecomix and the whistle-blower website, WikiLeaks. The primary analysis of Facebook data sets identifies complex power dynamic between Islamists and liberals, who have both played dominant roles in the battle over information dissemination in their attempts to control society.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been many discussions about the role of social media in the evolution of the so-called ‘the Arab Spring revolutions’ in late 2010 and early 2011, (see for example, Castells 2012, Khamis et al. 2011, Campbell 2011, Howard and Hussein 2013). Social media networks, particularly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, have been credited with shifting power from authoritarian Arab regimes to ordinary people who seek freedom and social justice. Debates around the use of internet and other information communication technologies (ICTs) by ordinary citizens for the organisation of social uprisings and in order to achieve political goals or promote democracy have been examined extensively by scholars and political commentators. Historically social media networks and other ICTs have been noted for their role in leading social movements in the last decade. For instance, the first reported use of social media networks by dissident groups took place in a civil revolt in Moldova in 2009, widely known as ‘the first Facebook revolution’ (Zuckerman 2009). The unrest in Iran in 2009 was also called ‘the first Twitter revolution’ (Sullivan 2009). Further, in the last century SMS was credited with playing a crucial role in toppling the Philippine’s President, Joseph Estrada, in 1995 (Shirky 2008). Dating even further back, cassette tapes were considered to have played an important role in the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 (Shirky 2008).

While a number of scholars believe ICTs have played a significant role in political uprisings, other scholars and commentators have their role is insignificant. For example, Malcom Gladwell (2011), wrote a *New Yorker* article titled, ‘The revolution will not be tweeted’, and claimed that social media is practically useless when it comes to serious activism. Gladwell's argument rests on two main ideas: first, that the social web is woven of what he calls ‘weak ties’ between people, whereas activism is driven by ‘strong ties’. Second, that those social networks are inherently devoid of hierarchy, which is central to the success of any organised civil movement. According to Gladwell, ‘this obviously does not mean that every political movement that uses these tools will succeed, because the state has not lost the power to react.’ Likewise, Evgeny Morozov (2011), in his book *The Net Delusion*, claims that social media and the internet are the ‘tools of oppressors’ not the ‘tools of liberators’ because governments can apply propaganda, censorship and surveillance (2011: 311). Morozov has

also pointed out that the internet in many contexts ‘empowers the strong and disempowers the weak’ (2011: xvii). These arguments are significant to this study because social media was used widely by Arab regimes before and during the uprisings; the regimes used social media to track-down activists and to monitor their online activities.

The role of social media networks during the first wave of social unrest in Egypt in 2011 has been the focus of empirical studies conducted by researchers and scholars (Lotan et al. 2011, Campbell 2011, DSG 2011, Howard and Hussein 2011). Qualitative and quantitative evidence was gathered during the events of the Egyptian uprisings that clearly connected the pervasiveness of social media networks with grassroots movements which shows how the networks have empowered civilian activists while disempowering the authoritarian regime. For instance, Gilad Lotan et al. (2011) focused on Twitter feeds posted by digital activists during the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Lotan’s analysis involved comparing information diffusion by the state’s mainstream media with Twitter data that reached global audiences through individual activists and journalists. The study concluded that the revolutions were, indeed, ‘tweeted’. The importance of the study was that for the first time it was clear how media could be produced and diffused worldwide and how it could rise up to compete with the mainstream, state-controlled media. This study was, therefore, a first glance at the power shift that occurred in favour of the Egyptian people as they generated global public support for their cause. In another study Khamis et al. (2011) described how political activists have used new forms of communication – especially digital and online social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and the video-sharing portal, YouTube – as tools for highlighting the regime abuses of citizens, for promoting citizen journalism, shaping public opinion, and organising and mobilising citizenry to combat repression. They conclude that ‘the balance of both political power and media power has shifted unpredictably and will continue to do so’.

Over time, however, the dissatisfaction of people with the triumph of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) in the first presidential and democratic elections has resulted in some political powers countering their own revolution, and this resulted in a second wave of uprisings which led to a military coup in July 2013. This military coup has then led to a third wave of social unrest which has countered the counter-revolution and led to demands for the return of legitimacy to the people and for a respect of the outcomes of the ‘Jan 25’ revolution.

In this thesis I will investigate how the role of social media networks changed during the Egyptian uprisings of 2011, 2012 and 2013. These uprisings resulted in the development of

new power structures that challenged the outcome of the ‘Jan 25’ 2011 revolution. In other words, the status quo that united all Egyptian people (radicals, moderates, Copts, liberals) through ‘networks of outrage and hope’ (Castells 2012) has been challenged and transformed by the emergence of what I call ‘networks of antagonism and hate’. These latter networks are producing their own ideologies and this is resulting in the social and political chaos that can be seen to be unfolding in contemporary Egypt.

In this thesis I highlight how the use of social media networks for political activism is a double-edged sword. Facebook, in particular, has been crucial for revolutionaries because at times it was the only medium of communication available to fight against the media monopolisation of counter-revolutionaries and the new military rulers. However, Facebook has also trapped civilian activists within the government’s techniques of surveillance that led to the imprisonment of many.

Research Questions

This study has been driven by two sets of questions:

1. To what extent did social media networks contribute to the Arab Spring revolutions? In what ways have social media networks worked as a catalyst for political mobilisation?
2. Has social media shifted the balance of power from state governments to the people? How have social media technologies and cultures shaped the production of networks of antagonism and hate?

Methodology

To examine the role of social media networks in change power relation dynamics between Arab revolutionaries and counter-revolutionary powers, I will specifically use the case study of Egypt and the uprisings between 2011 and 2013 (inclusive). I will use a digital ethnography approach to address the thesis questions. This approach, however, will include qualitative data sets as outlined below:

Digital ethnography: As this research investigates the role of social media networks during the Egyptian uprisings, these social media platforms of the revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries will be the primary source of information in this study. The importance of a

digital ethnography approach, according to Mike Wesh (2011), is that ‘media is not content, media is not just tools of communication, media mediates human relations [...] when media change human relations change’. Digital ethnography is a qualitative method that aims to open up and extend the understanding of how human beings live in the world. In the contemporary world humans now ‘live’ online in many ways. The objective of observing Egyptian online publics is:

- To understand a cultural context – how the emotional, symbolical, or social networks inform the lives of the people.
- To learn how people actually use social media networks in their everyday lives.
- To understand and document the suffering of people living under repressive regimes and to chart their fight for freedom and public liberties.
- To identify interactional patterns that form online relations. For example, weak-tie and strong-tie relations between people who engage with political arguments; such ties illuminate people’s passion for regime change.

This thesis highlights the importance of the digital ethnographical approach of charting the qualitative information on Facebook pages in order to understand socio-political change and to understand the diversity of struggles in Egypt between seculars and Islamists. The digital ethnographical approach I conduct in this thesis is based on Facebook datasets. The data collection criteria is based on:

- Self-observation as a participant of the revolutionaries’ Facebook pages by recording daily activity posts and recording the number of likes, shares and comments. This involves using web-scraping tools (computer software technique of extracting information from websites) like Chrome Scraping and, in some instances, sharing Facebook content with my personal Facebook page.
- Observing the most popular narratives of both the revolutionaries and the counter revolutionaries, narratives on Facebook which have played a critical role in dividing Egyptian society into two camps, Islamists and Liberals. As Frank Kermode notes: ‘Narratives matter. We use them to

make sense of the world, and we use that understanding to make decisions'. (cited in Rosen 2011)

With the concentration of attention on these two elements the thesis aims to understand how Facebook networks contribute to the discourse of the Egyptian revolution. This is important for comprehending how technology facilitates civic engagement.

Prior to this study it was clear that Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and text messages were fundamental to the empowerment of protesters in the Arab Spring and such media have clearly shaped the Arab uprisings by creating a space for interactions, action and reactions. According to Castells, 'the control of socialized communication by ideological and political authorities, and by the wealthy, was a key source of social power' (2009: 301) which resulted in a shift in power from entrenched dictators to people in town squares and in on digital realm.

Although this study is the first of its kind in analysing Facebook networks narratives, the study has some limitations. For instance, the information warfare between Islamists and Liberals in the Facebook sphere is not, in most cases, analysable using a digital ethnographic approach because in most cases the Facebook pages of both combatant camps were closed down by Facebook administrators after spam reports were conducted. Any other limits you want to signal here – more in terms of the limits of your method & theoretical approach?

Statement of Significance

The principle argument of this research is that social media networks in the Arab world have allowed people to bond together and thus create an online society where people can share common grievances. Such communication has helped to counter state-dominated ideology concerned with ethnicity and religious beliefs and has played a central role in mobilising people to act in order to shift power domination away from state governments to people. These networks, therefore, played a role in the downfall of some Arab regimes and those that have not fallen have been challenged by their presence.

Despite these advancements, the case study of the Egyptian Spring and the triumph of the Islamic Brotherhood (Ikhwan) in the democratic elections of 2012 shows how social media networks can transform into 'networks of antagonism and hate'. This was obvious when new Facebook pages emerged espousing hatred towards the ideology of the newly elected

president. Acting counter to this is the sympathisers of the Muslim Brotherhood who have also established new social media pages to fight back. The backlash has escalated in the sphere of social media to the point that anti-Ikhwan activists have organised and catalysed publics for a second wave of social unrest. The success of anti-Ikhwan social media propaganda, achieved by pronouncements of hatred directed at the new rivals, facilitated the call for the June 30, 2013 uprisings. This resulted in a second military coup and the ousting the legitimate president. The emergence of new power structures, therefore, have resulted in a chaotic social media atmosphere which is full of hatred and this has led to a divide in the loyalties of Egypt steering it towards an unknown future.

Outline of Chapters

This research is divided into four main chapters.

In Chapter One I focus on the Egyptian revolution as the case study of this thesis even though the Arab Spring was first sparked in Tunisia. I chose to study the Egyptian revolution, as opposed to the Tunisian one, because a) in Egypt there was, and continues to be, an excessive usage of social media for political mobilisation and coordination, b) in Egypt Aljazeera played a significant role in disseminating information using live broadcasting throughout the 18 days of turmoil in 2011, c) Egypt is important, politically, economically and geographically, in the Arab world and the world at large.

Chapter One outlines the historical, political, economic and social circumstances that sparked the Egyptian revolution. I also briefly outline the events of the Egyptian revolution as they were portrayed on social media networks, both those espousing the revolution as a source of hope and those opposing the revolution.

In Chapter Two I focus on the ‘network society’ thesis that claims that Arab societies rose up against their tyrant regimes through the use of social media networks. In this chapter I seek to address the following question: How was social media harnessed by Arab individuals to shift power from authoritarian regimes to people and in order to bring about political change? In other words, how has the power of communication shifted to individuals and societies seeking social justice and freedom? Thus by the transformation of the communication process from one to many, then many to many, and then many to one, I examine how social media networks can act as sites of ‘mass self-communication’ and as sites of communication

between ‘networked individuals’, both which lead to a ‘network society’ which becomes a ‘networked counter-power’.

Chapter Two is also an exploration of the socio-technological shifts in the Arab world. To gain an understanding of this I examine the connections between emergent social media networks and the Arab Spring revolutions. The internet has created new spaces for information flows, and new notions of space and time offered by digital networks have created what Howard Rheingold (2003) calls the ‘virtual community’, and what Lynch calls the ‘new Arab public sphere’ (2011: 65). In Chapter Two I study how the new Arab public sphere and study how it is driven by what Lynch calls ‘a generation that has gained the platforms and the mechanisms to engage in sustained arguments, debate and discussions about their common concerns’ (2011: 95).

Chapter Three is divided into three sections. First is an investigation of Julian Assange’s ‘WikiLeaks revolution’. In this section I seek to answer a number of questions: did the leaks ignite the Arab uprisings? Did WikiLeaks play a role in catalysing publics for political mobilisation by highlighting the corruption of Arab regimes? To what extent did WikiLeaks contribute to the Arab Spring uprisings? In the second section of Chapter Three is a focus on the role of the Aljazeera satellite channel in the Egyptian uprisings by bringing the political struggle to the world’s attention. I highlight how the channel raised awareness, catalysed publics and expanded the geographical space of the uprisings through ‘information cascades’. Also in this sub-section I explore the liaison between social media networks and Al-Jazeera and how Al-Jazeera empowered social actors by dismantling the barriers set up against information production and dissemination. The third section of Chapter Three I shed light on the role of the Hacktivists groups Anonymous and Telcomix. I outline how these groups rallied support for Arab digital activists as they fought a technological battle with their regimes, how they aided the revolutionaries by providing them with dial-up access points and how they executed other forms of hacking, all of which helped digital activists fight the monopolization of information dissemination.

In Chapter Four I analyse the role of social media platforms involved directly with the Arab Spring uprisings. I seek explicitly to answer the question: To what extent did social media networks contribute to the Arab Spring revolutions? In order to do this I outline my examination of the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and specifically those platforms associated with the Arab Spring uprisings. In studying the data

sets I examine social media platforms in order to assess : a) political impact and how they act as a political counter-power by challenging state monopoly over information, b) role in coordinating and mobilising publics and in disseminating information, c) ability to heighten social awareness by focusing on national unity and identity, d) networking individuals and the societies they form in the Arab world, e) responses from the regimes and these regimes' tactics in dealing with the rise of power in the sphere of social media. Chapter Four concludes with a consideration of how political networks have clashed within the space of social media

CHAPTER 1

THE EGYPTIAN UPRISINGS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to study the rise and fall of social media networks, examining how they shaped political activism by acting as a catalyst for political mobilisation. I will outline how these networks acted as tools for either the revolutionaries or the counter-revolutionaries in the pursuit of political goals. This chapter is divided into three parts. First is an outline of the origins of the Egyptian uprisings, that is, the ‘why’ and ‘how’ these uprisings occurred. Second is an exploration of Facebook activism and how it was used to prepare for democratic change in the first wave of social unrest. Finally, is a study of existing social media networks and the rise of powerful networks that have galvanised political mobilisation, whether through ‘networks of outrage and hope’ (Castells 2012) or ‘networks of antagonism and hate’.

1.2 The Seeds of the Egyptian Uprisings

Egypt is the most populous Arab state with an estimated 90 million people (World States Statistics 2013). Throughout history Egypt has been ruled by dictators and its people have therefore never voted in a president or engaged in democratic politics. The military coup of July 1952, when General Mohammed Najeeb, with the aid of the free army movement, ousted King Farooq and declared the republic of Egypt, is a historical event which Egyptians celebrate every year and which they call the ‘July Revolution’. Since 1952 Egypt has been ruled by military Generals. This situation persisted until 25 January, 2011 when the Egyptian Spring occurred. During the time of military rule, civil liberties were compromised, any opposition was suppressed, and an emergency law was imposed. In 1981 President Anwar Sadat was assassinated by some military officers who opposed the peace agreement Sadat had established with Israel. After this assassination Mubarak came to power.

Mubarak ruled Egypt with a hand of steel. He employed more than two million police and state security personnel who were given the power to use excessive force to suppress and humiliate people. This made him the most feared president in Egyptian history and Egyptian people became the most fearful people in the Arab world. Oppression and corruption characterised Mubarak’s 30 years in power and during this time Egypt suffered a major economic downturn. Unemployment reached more than 25% leaving an estimated 48 million Egyptians on the poverty line with over 2.5 million in extreme poverty. In one set of statistics

it was recorded that 30 million people were suffering from depression, and in 2009 alone more than 100,000 people attempted suicide resulting in 5000 deaths (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics 2012 cited in Ghonim 2012). The emergency law that Mubarak enforced meant that approximately 35,000 Egyptians were tortured (Ghonim 2012: 166). During Mubarak's rule elections were politically rigged, meaning that his party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), always held over 80% of the parliament seats. This left the opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, powerless and marginalised. As a result of the political situation strikes were common and took place in almost every city in Egypt. These strikes were held by employees of both the private and public sectors and were driven by people seeking equality, improved work conditions and pay rises. Between 2004 and 2010 more than 1,900 strikes took place with the involvement of approximately 1.7 million workers (Lee 2012: 5920). On 11 February 2011 President Hosni Mubarak declared his resignation as Egyptian President and handed power to the military ruling council. This announcement had a great impact and millions of Egyptian people who had suffered during his regime felt relief. 'It was unforgettable Berlin wall moment of the Arab world', as described by Ian Black (2012: 93). The events of the first Egyptian uprising astonished the world because Egyptian youth toppled their dictator in just 18 days and in doing so deconstructed the myth that absolute power holders could not be challenged. Mubarak, the 'strong man of Egypt', who had brutally ruled the nation, finally tasted the humiliation he had fed his people for the last three decades. The question being asked after the first revolution was how a tech-savvy individual, named Wael Ghonim, could, with just internet access, mobilise millions of people around the nation while sitting behind his laptop in Dubai? As Zizi Papacharissi, in her book *Networked Self* maintains:

the individual engages socially through a private media environment located within the individual's personal and private space. This private sphere of social interaction is rhetorically established by the individual by utilising existing and imagined geographies of place. (2010: 304-5)

The turning point of the 25 Jan 2011 mass mobilisation was ignited in July 2010 when Khaled Said, a 21 year old Egyptian man, was dragged out of an internet café in Alexandria by two state security officers and brutally assaulted and killed under the claim he was hiding marijuana. Witnesses at the internet café said the claim was baseless because Khalid Said was only targeted by the police because he was in possession of a video showing corrupt officers dealing drugs.

The ruthless killing of Said touched the hearts of many people when images of his shattered face were spread virally through social media platforms which labelled him 'the Martyr'. Authorities responded using state media and calling him the 'martyr of marijuana'. When police failed to open an investigation into the incident public protests took place across the country condemning the actions of the officers. Digital activists and other opponents of the government, including Mohammed ElBaradei, the previous head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the founder of the coalition of change movement, highlighted the police brutality on their personal Facebook pages. ElBaradei created the first Facebook page to portray Khalid Said's case and it was called 'My name is Khalid Mohammed Said'. Members who joined the page filled it with comments of support on the one hand and condemnation of police brutality on the other. A few weeks after ElBaradei's page was created a Google marketing executive named Wael Ghonim used his marketing experience to create a new Facebook page called 'Kullena Khalid Said' ('We Are All Khalid Said'). In 2010 Ghonim was a 30 year old middle class Egyptian who had been a digital activist for many years. On his 'Khalid Said' Facebook page he engaged in online activism and addressed two significant topics: fighting corruption and police brutality. The image of the battered body of Khalid Said which Ghonim had seen on ElBaradei's Facebook page made him proclaim on his own page that 'it's time for regime change' (Ghonim 2012). Ghonim's Facebook page, along with other Facebook pages such as 'April 6 youth', 'the sugar cane' and 'my name is Khalid Mohammed Said', organised many events including the 'silent stand' which took place prior to the declaration of the 'Jan 25th' day of protest.

While activity on the Facebook pages was prolific the actual declaration of 'Jan 25', and then the Jan 28 'day of rage', came as a result of the triumph of the Tunisian revolution in ousting Bin Ali. The catalyst for the Tunisian revolution, however, was the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidibouzaïd on Dec 17, 2010. Bouazizi was a 22 year old college graduate who, when he couldn't find a job to support his family, started his own business of selling vegetables on a cart as many others had also done. As an illegal vegetable street vendor he was a constant target of police. When the police confiscated his cart on the morning of 17 December 2010 he asked to get it back claiming it was the only source of income to support his poor family. In response a police woman approached him and slapped him on his face. While Bouazizi's business was important to him this slap damaged his dignity and led him to his protest against his country and its systems. As Castells states, 'dignity and bread were the original drivers of most movements' (2012: 96). Bouazizi's

protest in the form of self-immolation caught the attention of the millions of other young, educated but poor youth of the Arab world. Like Khaled Said before him the death resulted in public outrage and Facebook activists rallied support and called members to protest. The scale of the protesting quickly grew with thousands of young protesters on the streets of Tunisian cities. On 14 January 2011 Bin Ali fled the country to Saudi Arabia when the Tunisian army backed the revolution by refusing to turn their guns against their own people.

When Bin Ali fled Tunisia Egyptian activists believed the same was going to happen in Egypt, that is, that the army would back the revolutionaries. With this in mind Ghonim announced the ‘Jan 25’ day of protest on his Facebook page, ‘Kullena Khaled Said’. As Ghonim put it:

The only thing separated [sic] Egyptians from a revolution was our lack of confidence and our exaggerated perception of the regimes [sic] strength. Yet after what happened in Tunisia, I though [sic] the Egyptian masses might finally get the message and break the psychological barrier of fear. (2012: 133)

The first Egyptian revolution would never have taken place without the message of hope and courage provided by the Tunisian youth who brought democracy to their country when the Islamic moderate political party, ‘Hizbul Elnahdah’, claimed victory. As Manuel Castells indicates, ‘without any doubt, the spark of indignation and hope that was born in Tunisia [...] brought down the Mubarak regime’ (2012: 94). After 18 days of turmoil commencing on 25 January, with more than 800 Egyptians killed and thousands injured, Hosni Mubarak gave way to the power of his people. As described by Ghonim after the revolution, ‘the power of people is greater than the people in power’ (2012: 294). Though, the use of digital platforms particularly Facebook provided Egyptian activist a platform to share grievances and catalysed civilians for political mobilisation.

1.3 Facebook Political Activism in Egypt

Philip Howard defines cyber-activism as, ‘the act of using the internet to advance a political cause that is difficult to advance offline’ (2011: 145). He adds that ‘the goal of such activism is often to create intellectually and emotionally compelling digital artefacts that tell stories of injustice, interpret history, and advocate for particular political outcomes’ (2011: 145). Facebook played a central role in the Egyptian revolution which was later dubbed the ‘Facebook revolution’. Even the youth who participated in the ‘Jan 25’ event were called

shabab el-Facebook (Facebook youth), and Esraa Abdel-fattah, from the Kefaya movement, became known as 'Facebook girl'. According to David Wolman Facebook political activism in Egypt emerged in winter 2007 with the activities of *Kefaya* (Enough) movement member and political activist Ahmed Maher (Wolman 2012). Maher found himself coming to the idea of using Facebook for political activism when he saw a Facebook fan page with over 45,000 members for the Egyptian soccer team when it qualified for the finals of the African cup championship. At this point Maher saw the potential of Facebook as a tool for political mobilisation. As Wolman says:

He [Maher] was captivated by the idea that a Facebook group is inclusive and egalitarian. It gives participants the power to reach out [to] all other members at any moment, from anywhere. (2012: 125)

Prior to Facebook thousands of strikes had taken place in Egypt but none were of a large scale and none had achieved their goals. As Catherine Dong argued, in her book *The Middle East Revolutions*, 'this [was] probably because the number of people between the rich and the poor were few, and there was no Facebook or Twitter. Or even union halls' (2012: 120).

When the regime cornered Maher and Abdel-Fattah the April 6 Youth movement administrators considered blocking the Facebook page. At this time, though, the regime decided to raise workers' wages with the aim of trying to neutralise one of the primary grievances that had fuelled the riots in Mahalla el-Kubra (Wolman 2011: 142). The Egyptian government saw the protests and the rumours around them as a threat to national security (Al Ezzi, et al., 2008) and thus Maher was prosecuted and charged with a range of offences: using Facebook to establish an illegal organisation which aimed to overthrow the regime and annul the constitution, funding and printing T-shirts that called for a disruption to public peace, spreading rumours in order to incite hatred of the government, defaming the president and police, and disrupting traffic (Wolman, 2008).

Overall, the killing of Khaled Said on June 6, 2010 opened up a new regime of Facebook activism. Facebook pages were created in memory of Khaled Said and to raise awareness of police brutalities. They were also used to encourage political change and to facilitate political mobilisation, a potential which became known through the use of Facebook for political change in other countries. In 2011 the Egyptian presidential elections revived Facebook activism in Egypt. Mohammed ElBaradei established the National Coalition for Change and nominated himself for the coming elections. In doing this he followed in the steps of US

President Obama who employed social media, including Facebook, to promote his party. Actually social media played a key role in Obama winning the US elections in 2008. ElBaradei's Facebook attracted hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy members who were willing to support him in the elections when Mubarak was grooming his son, Jamal, to take over the presidential role. Generally between 2008 and the 'Jan 25' day of protest Facebook, according to Castells (2012), acted as a network of outrage and hope.

1.4 Networks of Outrage and Hope

During the political activism in Egypt in the twenty-first century Facebook has played a central role in political triumphs against the regime. Prior to the waves of unrest in Egypt the Egyptian regime had held power through fear, brutality and torture. Facebook was significant in dismantling the fear barrier and subsequently it became a medium for the expression of outrage. As Castells writes, 'people overcome fear by being together, and they were [together] in the internet social networks and in the urban networks formed in the squares. But to come together in throngs they needed a strong motivation, a mobilizing force' (2012: 81). For Castells, '[o]utrage induces fearless risk-taking and there was extreme outrage against police abuse, against hunger rising in the country and against the desperation that led people to immolate themselves' (2012: 81). On the other hand, hope 'c[a]me from Tunisia, it showed that it was possible to topple an entrenched regime if everybody would come together and fight uncompromisingly, to the end, regardless of risks' (Castells 2012: 81). The world came to know Bouazizi because his act of desperation was broadcast globally using social media networks and this sparked hope in people who shared common grievances and encouraged them to act against their oppressors. For the first wave of social unrest in Egypt, therefore, people depended on social networks to express their outrage. During this time the most important Facebook portals were 'April 6 youth movement', 'My name is Khaled Mohammed Said' and 'Kullena Khalid Said'. For example, a scholar named Mona el-Tahawi tweeted, '#egypt #jan 25 protests initiated by 2 dissident movements, based online: @Elshaheed (2 Khaled Said) and 6april youth group' (@mona eltahawi, 2011; see Figure 1.1).

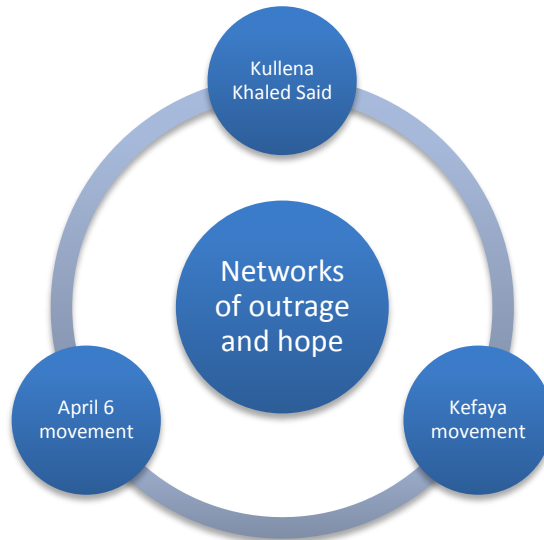


Figure 1.1: Shows Facebook networks of outrage and hope that played significant role in political activism in Egypt during the uprisings.

The most significant Facebook network that played crucial role in the mass mobilisation during ‘Jan 25’ uprisings and in leading the political transition was ‘Kullena Khalid Said’ Kullena Khaled Said (We Are All Khaled Said) is considered the largest revolutionary Facebook page as there are 3.8 million members have joined the network. See profile picture.



This Facebook page was created anonymously under the name of ‘ElShaheed’ (‘the martyr’). The creator of the page kept his identity hidden so he would not be prosecuted when the regime banned Facebook groups being created for the events of Mahallah in 2008. The Dubai-based digital activist, Wael Ghonim, has never been beaten by police or detained. At the time of the page’s creation he was a Google marketing manager who had felt the suffering of his own people at the hands of Mubarak’s men. Ghonim could see that 40% of Egyptians

were living below the poverty line, he knew of the daily humiliations, and was aware of the economic downturn and widespread corruption. He felt there was an urgent need for political change. His way of contributing to political change was to create the Khaled Said Facebook page in order to raise awareness among Egyptian youth and ask to ask for justice to be done for Khalid Said. According to Ghonim the main aim of the Facebook page was to mobilise public support for Khalid Said's case (Ghonim 2012: 67). For the title of the page he choose the word 'Kullena' (we are all) with an Egyptian spelling so he could send a message to Egyptian youth that they are all vulnerable to police brutality. That is, he wanted to emphasise that any one of them could face death at the hand of police and any one of them could be arrested with or without charge. In fact Ghonim, in his book *Revolution 2.0*, outlined the aims of his Facebook page:

1. To convince people to join the page by reading its posts,
2. To make people interact with content using 'like', 'comment' and 'share',
3. To get people to participate in the page's online campaigns,
4. To encourage people to contribute to its content themselves and
5. Most importantly to get people to participate in the activism on the street.

Ghonim described the purpose of the page in his own words:

The page needed to speak directly to its members and convince them to be active participants [...] and it [...] [was] also important to break free from all barriers of fear that controlled so many of us. (2012: 68)

With the aim of bringing the police who killed Said to justice Ghonim announced, through his Facebook page, the first silent protest that was to take place along Alexandria cornice on 18 June 2010 at 5pm. The theme of the event was for everyone to wear a black tee-shirt and to adopt a non-violent and non-confrontational approach of standing side by side with their hands held up facing the sea.

Ghonim's success in organising 'the silent stand in black' events encouraged him to reach out to non-Arabic speakers by extending the 'Khalid Said' Facebook page to an international audience and scale in order to pressure Mubarak. Ghonim made this decision after surveying 1,355 page members, of which 78% agreed they should reach out to an international audience (2012: 93). In order to do this Ghonim enlisted the help of an Egyptian expatriate in the US and together they created the English version of the Facebook page and called it 'We Are all Khalid Said'. This page gained momentum and became a powerful influence when it reached

over 250,000 members in the first two months. It also created a sense of community and a sense that people could stand up to the regime which had held power so long through fear, brutality, indiscriminate detention and torture in order to keep people in line. Through the promotion of a culture of dialogue and acceptance the page cultivated tolerance amongst its members; this despite the web community being characterised by anonymity. The whole group was virtual; most members did not see or know each other except for the initials, a nickname, and/or photo of other individuals. This anonymity, though, gave the web community more freedom and flexibility because people tended to talk more freely when their identity was concealed.

After the success of the silent protests, the 'Kullena Khalid Said' Facebook page reached a critical point when the vivid scenes of the Tunisian revolution ignited the enthusiasm of Egyptian youth. After seeing Bin-Ali's regime fall a wave of digital activism targeted the Mubarak regime. Ghonim, therefore, with the help of the 'April 6 movement', declared a day of protest on 'Jan 25'. 'Jan 25' is typically 'Police Day' and a public holiday in Egypt. It is a day when police commemorate the 1952 massacre of Egyptian police at the hands of British soldiers during clashes over the Suez Canal. On the 'Kullena Khalid Said' Facebook page Ghonim posted, 'Jan 25 is police day and its national holiday [...] if 100,000 take the streets, no one can stop us [...] I wonder if we can?' (2012: 134). This post received 3,022 'likes', 1750 comments and was viewed 176,013 times. Then Ghonim later posted, 'let Jan 25 be the torch of change for our nation' (2012: 136) and this Facebook invitation reached 500,000 Facebook users and 27,000 people RSVPd to the event. The number of members also increased to 600,000 after the message about the 'Jan 25' demonstration was posted. By 21 January more than 100,000 people had confirmed they were attending and the invitation had reached more than 1million people (2012: 160).

The 'Kullena Khalid Said' Facebook, therefore, succeeded in promoting the 'Jan 25' day of protest. It then played a significant role in supporting the 'day of anger' on Friday Jan 28th which occurred after the police had crushed 'Jan 25' protesters. After these events Ghomin praised the success of his page highlighting that it represented all Egyptians who didn't belong to a political party; he said it addressed issues of injustice, torture and unemployment.

From this example it is clear that Facebook activism during the first wave of social unrest in Egypt resulted in political change and shifted power to benefit the users of social media networks. This success and happiness, however, did not last long because counter

revolutionaries then harnessed the power of Facebook and other social media platforms in order to dismantle the social unity that had been created. Just as social media had been used to promote democracy and justice it was employed to engender disinformation, propaganda and persecution. This counter use of social media has resulted in the emergence of two camps, Islamists and liberals, and the virtual interaction between them has transformed the networks of outrage and hope into networks of antagonism and hate (see Figure 1.2).

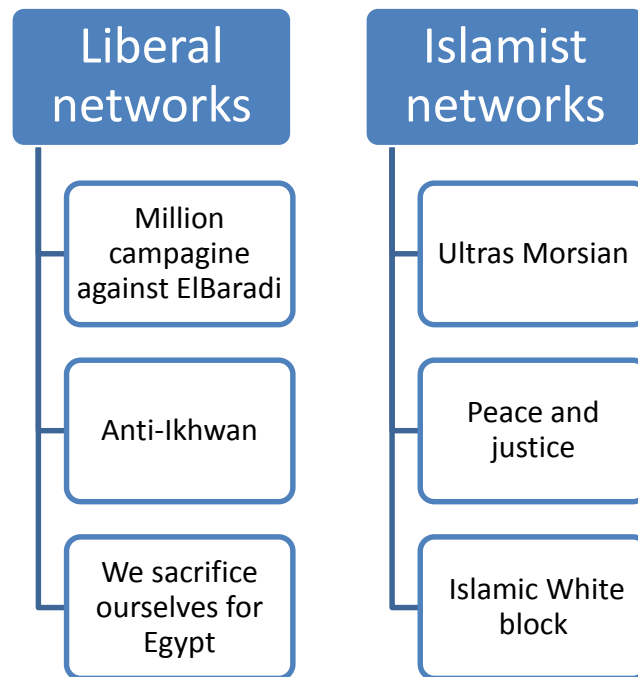


Figure 1.2: Shows the transformations of social networks into liberal vs. Islamism networks

According to Lynch, just those ‘18 days’ created a bond of shared sacrifice and struggle which washed away differences of class, ideology and generation. This bond, though, couldn’t survive the return to normal politics and unfortunately revolutionary actions just became part of the currency of the politics of power (2012: 2124). Despite the events that have occurred since it cannot be denied that for a period the networks were ones of hope and outrage which triumphed and challenged the long-held power of the regime in the favour of the civilian activists. Mark Gornetter described the power of such relationships in his 1973 theory ‘the strength of weak ties’.

1.5 The Strength of Weak Ties

Mark Granovetter's seminal work, *The Strength of Weak Ties* (1973) is about the structure of friendships and networks but in a period before the shares, likes and comments of Facebook. Granovetter argues that weak ties can serve as bridges connecting two friends together. It is a means of connecting two people from multiple groups of friends. Weak ties, though, do not automatically become bridges. For this to happen the tie must be made locally, which means it must be made personally and this requires the cognitive power of two friends who can see the potential for shared friends to exist between them. Granovetter defines a tie, and its strength, as 'a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie' (1973: 1361). He suggested that if AB are connected, and A and C are connected, B and C will also be connected. This is particularly the case if the ties between two people, that is A and B, are strong. In actual fact when the tie is very strong the people around the initial two people will automatically be tied such that the introduction of other people into the relationship is redundant (1973: 1362).

Granovetter argues that for diffusion to occur across a network it is the weak ties that are the most valuable. He argues that diffusion studies tend to not be socio-metric and those that do not characterize the tie type (1973: 1368). Another important aspect of Granovetter's work is the strong emphasis on the linking of macro and micro theories. Weak ties, Granovetter suggests, are more likely to link different groups together and so they can provide a way of connecting the theories about small groups or families with more macro discussions of social structure.

Granovetter also comments on the quantity of ties. He argues that the more weak ties, or local bridges, per person, the more 'cohesive' a community is and the greater their ability for acting collectively. These weak ties are fundamental in connecting tight knit groups with the rest of the community and for allowing networking to occur between different groups. They are thus vital for community strength and organisation (1973: 1373).

In regards to social activism and the topic of this chapter, Granovetter argues that weak ties play a seminal role in building trust among a large group of loosely affiliated members, which is essential for rallying behind a cause. Granovetter's theories, therefore, can be used for examining the role of Facebook in the Arab Spring uprisings. For example, the 'Kellena Khalid Said' Facebook page was the medium used to pre-announce the 'Jan 25' day of

protest which involved the congregation of millions of young protesters demanding dignity and freedom (Castells 2012, Lynch 2011, Ghonim 2012). Really the structure of this Facebook network was built around clusters of weak tie relations. The Facebook groups of over two million members with weak tie relations succeeded in mobilising most of their members and these members influenced other clusters of networked groups (e.g. April 6 youth and Kefaya movements) to also respond to the call for protest.

Essentially the dynamics of the network clusters influenced the Egyptian revolution in four main ways:

- a) They created publics. That is they built the infrastructure of collective action by connecting people together.
- b) They empowered masses by expanding the network. This created a collective social obligation which acted as the catalyst for political mobilisation.
- c) They allowed information diffusion between groups of fellow participants rather than the more typical diffusion between the state and the population.
- d) They built trust among participants as they inhibited a virtual and democratic sphere that allowed them to share common grievances without questions of class and religion interfering.

In this way the networked ties overcame some of the hindrances to collective action under autocratic regimes. Some of these hindrances are typically problems with information diffusion, an inability to shape the public sphere, problems with synchronisation, and the basic inability to organise mass political action. During the Arab Spring Facebook and Twitter, and other social media tools, facilitated the revolution by capitalising on the power of weak ties. As already mentioned the Facebook page, 'Kullena Khaled Said', engaged users, solicited a range of ideas from Egyptian people, and was used to announce the 'Jan 25' mass protest day. It is impossible that the two million people who liked the page were directly or strongly connected to the case of Khaled Said. It is clear, therefore, the page's popularity must have grown due to the weak ties that existed amongst the group of people using the Facebook page. The weak ties facilitated through Facebook, through 'shares', 'likes' and comments, were responsible for raising awareness and quickly spreading knowledge of the Arab Spring case. The weak ties, therefore, played a pivotal role in the successful execution of the revolts.

In summary, Facebook groups in both Egypt and Tunisia were ultimately the medium of communication that organised the political mobilisation in these countries. Facebook groups were very active years before the Arab Spring uprisings. Despite the censorship and surveillance policies the Arab regimes imposed they misjudged the threat posed by the social networks. Since the Arab Spring uprisings Arab regimes have increased their control of mass media, political opposition and journalists leaving Facebook groups to continue to freely act on the internet. Facebook has therefore come to be considered the main source of trustworthy news, both prior to, during and after the revolutions. In Egypt Lisa Anderson claimed that the Egyptian Facebook campaigners 'are the modern incarnation of Arab nationalist networks whose broadsheets disseminated strategies for civil disobedience throughout the region in the years after World War I' (Anderson 2011).

1.6 Networks of Antagonism and Hate

Antagonism, according to Dictionary.com is, 'an active hostility or opposition [...] between unfriendly or conflicting groups'. Antagonism and hate are common emotional responses expressed during social conflict and they serve the function of establishing and maintaining group identities. According to Georg Simmel, conflict sets boundaries between groups by strengthening group consciousness and awareness of each group's separateness from other groups. Simmel writes:

[r]eciprocal antagonisms between groups preserve social divisions and systems of stratification. The distinction between one's own group and outsiders is established in and through conflict. This includes conflicts between classes, nations, ethnic groups, and political parties. (cited in Neil Gilbert 2004: 164)

The difference between antagonism and hate is that antagonism is 'active' and thus often involves killing while hate is expressed in people's hearts. Since the January days of protest both these social behaviours have been expressed in the Facebook pages of the revolutionaries and the counter revolutionaries as they have expressed their social, class, ethnic and religious beliefs. Fahmy el-Howaydi, an Egyptian political analyst and columnist, called the year 2013 'the year of hate' (Aljazeera 2013). In his weekly column for *Aljazeera Arabic*, on the 24th December 2013 el-Howaydi wrote, 'in the modern Egyptian history I didn't find a paradigm to describe the current social and political divisions that split the society aiming to eradicate and destroy the other as I see today' .

In calling the year 2013 one of hate el-Howaydi explains that he specifically referring to the degree of media polarisation that has arisen and which is now poisoning the minds of the Egyptian public. This hatred is eroding the social ties that once existed between Egyptian civilian activists. In his column el-Howaydi goes on to outline the motives and the characteristics of this hate. He indicates that media platforms have become a partner in supporting campaigns of hatred against politically different groups. For example, he highlights how opposition and disapproval has been expressed about the abuse of Copts and Shiites. The State and its media outlets have also used Facebook to galvanise publics to confront and to promote a hatred of people of the Muslim Brotherhood at the same time as opposing the hatred of Christians and Shiites. This hatred has resulted in the bodily harming of Ikhwan members and their supporters. Their economic interests have been attacked by the burning of their businesses , including small businesses, and the imprisonment and torture of their members by security staff and regime ‘thugs’ who suspected certain people of being Ikhwan sympathisers.

In contemporary Egypt social media has thus become a battleground. Supporters of the new military rulers have fought against the Ikhwan and its supporters and their narratives using the sphere of social media and the many regime-sponsored Facebook pages, Twitter feeds and other internet content threads. Online campaigns now aim to change the minds of the supporters of each camp. They try to persuade supporters of the other ‘camp’ to join their cause. They aim to disorient the opposition and to reframe the political debate.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the roots of the Egyptian uprisings and the role of social networks in these uprisings. I specifically focused on the role of the ‘Kullena Khalid Said’ Facebook network, examining how it facilitated political mobilisation in Egypt. This chapter has also illuminated how social networks have changed from being sites of cohesion and hope to ones of antagonism and hate, a situation which has contributed to the current divide in Egyptian society. In order to more fully understand the role social media networks played in the three political uprisings in Egypt, in Chapter Two I outline the theoretical grounds of this research, addressing Castells’ concept of the network society followed by an examination of the new Arab public sphere.

Chapter Two

The Network Society Thesis and the Emergence of New Arab Public Sphere

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to review the qualitative evidence on the role of information communication technologies (ICTs) in transforming Egyptian society to a networked society. This transition has established new forms of social relations between the multilayered social settings. A literature review of scholarship on social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and how they have empowered activists while dis-empowered authoritarian regimes, is included in this chapter. Such scholarship demonstrates how social media networks acted as a cohesive in the first wave of social unrest in Egypt in 2011 but then re-established social fragmentation in the second and third waves of social unrest in 2012 and 2013.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first is a focus on the ‘network society thesis’, a theory that draws a connection between what Manuel Castells calls ‘mass self-communication’ (2007, 2009) and what Mark Lynch calls ‘the new Arab public sphere’ (2010, 2012) in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings. In this section an attempt is made to answer the following questions: To what extent did social media networks contribute to the Egyptian revolutions? How did social media networks shift the balance of power from the Egyptian authoritarian regime to the people and vice versa? The second section sheds light on the role of social media networks and the emergence of the Egyptian public sphere. The third section examines communication power theory as being the foundation for a theoretical approach that explains the power shifts that occurred.

2.2 The Dawn of the Arab Networked Society

The network society thesis, as it relates to the Arab world, shows how social media networks played a major role in shifting the balance of power from Arab authoritarian regimes to the people. Narratives relaying the role of social media networks in the Egyptian revolution have upset state-society relations and revealed an imbalance at the social level which has split the society at large. On the one hand, social media networks have empowered individuals by creating space for political debate and helped to organise political action, or what Castells calls ‘networks of outrage and hope’ (2012). On the other hand, these networks have created a struggle for power between social actors who have established new forms of networks vs. networks and multitudes vs. multitudes, leading to the emergence of what I call ‘networks of antagonism and hate’. As a result, these power structures have created a chaotic public

sphere, and this is reflected in the structure of social media networks that have played a central role in restoring the power of authoritarianism which was the case of Egypt in 2013.

To place the Arab world in a network society thesis context Castells and Himanen (2001) suggest that the network society of a country has to be extensively studied in terms of information technology infrastructure, production and knowledge (Castells 2005: 26). Such a study was carried out by Kalathel and Boas (2003) in their book *Open Networks Closed Regimes*. In this text the scholars highlight how they studied the impact of internet diffusion on authoritarian rule in seven countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt. Despite their sceptic views that the internet may reinforce mechanisms of control and increase the power of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, the study outlines how authoritarian regimes have invested in information infrastructure to develop communication facilities equal to the industrial world. For instance, the Egyptian government, according to Kalathel and Boas; 'has been enthusiastic about the medium's prospects for economic development, implementing programs to encourage the rural diffusion of the internet and bridge the digital divide' (2003: 106). Many of these programs were supported by USAID to develop internet diffusion in Egypt. For example, USAID have invested \$39.1 million in ICT assistant programmes to promote e-government, e-commerce and ICT diffusion (Kalathel and Boas 2003: 123). Although the Egyptian government didn't censor the internet when it first adapted the new medium of communication in the 1990s, it has promoted self-censorship in the population due to country's limited Internet access. According to Kalathel and Boas, though, 'it has publicised crackdowns against what it considers socially and politically inappropriate Internet use' (2003: 106). The rapid growth of internet and other ICTs, such as mobile phones and satellite channels, penetrations in Egypt, according to the World States Statistics, is 30% per annum since first adapted. This has forced the Egyptian government to implement massive censorship mechanisms to contain political and Islamist sentiments. As Jon Alterman noted, 'the Egyptian people are more knowledgeable and wired than ever before' (cited in Kalathel and Boas 2003: 124).

Further, the rapid growth in internet and mobile phone communications in Egypt, as the internet penetration according to the World States Statistics (2012) reaches 35%, and the Mobile phone use 93%, officially makes Egyptian society 'networked'. This has been strengthened by the advent of social media networks in 2004 and the rapid adoption of new social technology by Egyptian communities at large; this has connected people in

unprecedented ways and in ways beyond state control. In this context, Castells suggests that ‘digital communication networks are the backbone of the network society’ (2005: 4). Despite this, however, Internet penetration in Egypt is still relatively low in rural areas and the vast majority of users are located in urban areas.

2.3 Dimensions of the Network Society

As this dissertation aims to analyse the link between social media networks and political mobilisation through the creation of a network society, for a start, the network society is defined by Castells as a:

Social structure based on networks operated by information and communication technologies based in microelectronics and digital computer networks that generate, process, and distribute information on the basis of the knowledge accumulated in the nodes of the networks. (2005: 7)

According to Castells, the network society is distinguished by the following trends. First, ‘it is manifested in the transformation of sociability’ (2005: 11). Castells suggests that the emergence of ‘networked individualism’ has become the dominant culture of our societies. He writes, ‘the new communication technologies perfectly fit into the mode of building sociability along self-selected communication networks, on or off depending on the needs and moods of each individual. So, the network society is a society of networked individuals’ (2005: 12). This view was reaffirmed by Yochai Benkler (2007) in his book *The Wealth of Networks*, ‘we are a networked society now – networked individuals’. According to Benkler,

The diversity of perspectives on the way the world is and the way it could be for any given individual is qualitatively increased. This gives individuals a significantly greater role in authoring their own lives, by enabling them to perceive a broader range of possibilities, and by providing them a richer baseline against which to measure the choices they in fact make. (2007: 9)

Moreover, Mary Joyce, in her collection of essays *Digital Activism Decoded* has connected the power of ‘networked individuals’ to political movements:

The infrastructure of digital activism is based on the digital network — an interconnected group of devices that use digital code to transmit information. The beauty of networks is that connectivity is distributed. Networks do not

connect us only to the center; they link us to each other as well. And, when large numbers of citizens are able to more easily connect to one another, to send and receive original content, and to coordinate action, they are able to create effective political movements. (2010: 2)

The importance of the emergence of new forms of socialised communication has largely shaped the culture of network society in the sense that the exchanged messages have become electronic hyper-text linked networks of different communication modes (Castells 2005: 13-14).

The second dimension of a network society is the transformation of communication, particularly the communication of the media. Castells indicates that ‘the structure and dynamics of socialised communication is essential in the formation of consciousness and opinion, at the source of political decision making’ (2005: 12). In this sense the information technology revolution of the 21st century has transformed Egyptian society at large. The rise of social media networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube), the independent Satellite channels (Aljazeera, al-Arabiya), the online news websites (Rassd, Masrawi), Whistle-blower platforms (Tunileaks, Arab-WikiLeaks) and Smart phone applications (Whatsapp, Viber, messageMe) have changed mass societies into networked societies.

As the network society diffuses, and new communication technologies expand their networks, there is an explosion of horizontal networks of communication. Castells (2007, 2009) describes this phenomenon as the rise of ‘mass self-communication’, a phenomenon now rapidly evolving in these new media spaces. He contends, ‘The diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software,’ [...] ‘have prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time’ (2007: 246). However, in relation to this several scholars have emphasised the relationship between the ‘self’, ‘publics’, ‘networks’ and the widespread nature of communication networks in the society at large. For example, Barry Wellman (2002) called the phenomenon ‘networked individualism’, and Christian Fuchs (2003) ‘self-organized networks’. Moreover, danah boyd and Zizi Papacharissi (2010) call it ‘networked self’ and ‘network publics’. According to boyd, ‘network publics are restructured in technology networks, where people get connected for social, cultural and civic purposes, and the technology offer the people tools to duplicate images, texts and videos that makes

communication feasible' (2010: 41). Consequently, the emergence of this new form of communication has changed and challenged the process of information production and consumption. The process has transformed the model of one to many method of media dissemination offered by traditional media (radio, television, newspapers) to the capacity to process many-to-many, and many-to-one. As Castells observed:

The Internet-based horizontal networks of communication are activated by communicative subjects who determine both the content and the destination of the message, and are simultaneously senders and receivers of multidirectional flows of messages. (2009: 130)

In regards to the third dimension of a networked society, Castells notes,

since politics is largely dependent on the public space of socialized communication, the political process is transformed under the conditions of the culture of real virtuality. Political opinions, and political behaviour, are formed in the space of communication. (2005: 14)

The emergence of social media networks in Egypt, therefore, has engaged the Egyptian population in local politics. The democratic nature of social networks has created a space for public participation by removing divisions based on social class, ethnicity, gender and religion. This has included the engagement of marginalised members of society in public discussions that have directed the political agenda towards the promotion of democracy in the Arab world. Mark Lynch (2010) calls this phenomenon the emergence of 'the new Arab public sphere'. During the three waves of social uprisings in Egypt, the Egyptian public sphere has a paradigm shift – from private to public to chaotic.

As developed by Jürgen Habermas in 1962, the public sphere is 'a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed' (Habermas 1974: 49 cited in Zizi Papacharissi 2010: 232). According to Habermas the most important feature of the public sphere is its engagement of the public in 'rational-critical debate' (1989: 51).

Habermas adds that this debate consists of 'a set of basic rights concerned the sphere of the public engaged in rational-critical debate (freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly and association, etc.)' (1989: 83).

In the context of the Arab Spring, a ‘public sphere’ analysis highlights how emerging social media networks have created a virtual democratic civil society and how this new society has transformed Arab public opinion into political activism and in doing so has led to the promotion of democracy in the Arab World. As Mathew Hindman suggests in his book, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*,

The internet is re-distributing political influence; it is broadening the public sphere, increasing political participation, involving citizens in political activities that were previously closed to them, and challenging the monopoly of traditional elites. (2009: 117)

Several scholars have identified possibilities created by the Internet and digital media technologies to develop a ‘virtual public sphere’ (Poster 1997), or what Benkler (2006) terms a ‘networked public sphere’. About the emergence of social media networks Benkler et al. note,

Facilitated by the spread of digital communication technologies, the networked public sphere has emerged over the past two decades as an important venue for discussion and debate over matters of public interest. The networked public sphere is an alternative arena for public discourse and political debate, an arena that is less dominated by large media entities, less subject to government control, and more open to wider participation. The networked public sphere is manifest as a complex ecosystem of communication channels that collectively offer an environment that is conducive for communication and the creation of diverse organizational forms. This digital space provides an alternative structure for citizen voices and minority viewpoints as well as highlights stories and sources based on relevance and credibility. (2013: 5)

Additionally, in his book *Cultural Chaos* Brian McNair suggests that,

The public sphere is shifting from a national, to an increasingly global, phenomenon so that [...] the twenty-first century public sphere is much more complex and interconnected, and it is global, interacting with the local, and using ICTs to involve global publics in engaging the key issues of the time [...] politics has become globalised, and so has the means of debating it. (2006: 143)

In a recent study carried out by Yochai Benkler et al., the emerging data suggests that, ‘the networked public sphere enabled a dynamic public discourse that involved both individual and organisational participants and offered substantive discussion of complex issues contributing to affirmative political action’ (2013: 4). Within this context, the history of the public sphere in the Arab world is the history of the emergence of the internet, and later social media networks. Typically Arab society has been oppressed and closed. Arab authoritarians have chosen to use violence, repression and harassment against free speech and have suppressed calls for democracy and public liberty. Successive Egyptian governments have controlled and monopolised all media of communication, particularly radio and television, in order to minimise the public’s political participation. Public opinion, therefore, has been discussed in closed and private spheres, such as private homes, cafes and places of worship where a high level of secrecy can be guaranteed.

A recent study by the United States Pew Internet and American life Research Centre (2013) found that the use of social networking sites for discussing politics ranked significantly higher in several Arab countries. This despite the fact that the proportion of people using social networking sites in Arab nations is generally ranked lower than a number of other nations surveyed. Still, in Egypt (63%) and Tunisia (63%), two nations at the heart of the Arab Spring, more than six-in-ten social networkers said they shared views about politics online.

The first platform that created a space for political debate in the Arab world was the web logs (blogs), in Arabic called *Mudawanah*. The Arab blogging committee in their second meeting in Tunisia in 2011 has praised the outcome of the Arab Spring revolutions, the meeting statement indicated, ‘new spheres of expression long closed and forbidden to us are now open. Reclaiming, defending and efficiently utilising these spaces to debate and promote our visions of the new Arab world will be our most immediate task. A survey carried out by Berkman Research Centre (2011) showed that one third of Arab bloggers have been threatened due to their opinions and one fifth reported that their online accounts have been hacked.

Lynch (2007) believes that even though Arab political blogs are unlikely to lead a revolution they have the potential to create a public sphere which may reshape politics in the decades to come. Although blogging activism has been limited to upper and middle classes citizens (who

can afford to access and use the medium), it has created plural and public sphere of political debate and reshaped public opinion by highlighting the regime's corruption and repression. Lynch also says that in order for political blogs to help deliver democracy or political revolution it is important for political analysts to 'explore the variety of ways in which blogs might transform the dynamics of Arab public opinion and political activism' (Lynch 2007).

In fact Lynch believes that the Arab blogs did not 'lead the Arab Spring revolutions', but I believe and argue that the bloggers themselves did lead the revolutions. Furthermore, claims that the Arab Spring revolutions were leaderless because they were born in the digital sphere is questionable. For instance, Sami Bin Gharbia (a prominent Tunisian blogger who lives in exile because of his political activism) has administrated '*Nawaa*' – a famous Tunisian blog that played a central role in raising awareness of the Tunisian revolution. Likewise, Wael Ghonim (Egyptian political activist who runs the blog called the Big Pharaoh), the creator of '*Kullena Khalid Said*' Facebook page, was the catalyst for the political mobilisation associated with the events of the 'January 25th' revolution. Both Bin-Gharbia and Ghonim were at the centre of the events because *Nawaa* and the *Said* Facebook pages were planned events and guided masses. This happened, though, with the help of other prominent and well known bloggers such as Wael Abbas, Ala'a Abdel-fatah, Asma Mahfouz and Ahmad Maher. Thus political bloggers have led revolutions by harnessing the power of new technologies and transferring their activism from a private sphere to a public one. Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) in his book *Tweets and Streets* suggested that there are soft leaders that make use of social media for choreographing protests and 'constructing a *choreography of assembly*' (2012: 139). He notes 'a handful of people control most of the communication flow' (2012: 135). The choreography of assembly, according to Gerbaudo means 'the use of social media in directing people towards specific protest events, in providing participants with suggestions and instructions about how to act, and in the construction of an emotional narration to sustain their coming together in public space' (2012: 12).

Despite this, the Arab public sphere, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt, was questioned when Islamic political parties declared that the ultimate triumph was the democratic elections in 2011/2012. As a result, a second wave of social unrest has caused a series of imbalances in the Egyptian public sphere. The counter revolution powers (e.g. seculars, the national party, the Coptic Church), equipped with social media networks and mainstream TV channels (e.g. CBC, One TV, Nile TV, The Pharaoh's), have created multiple public spheres leading to a

split in society, a hindrance of democratic transformations and the re-establishment of autocracy. Even the involvement of pan-Arab satellite channels, such as Aljazeera and al-Arabiya, which played a critical role in the lead up to the Arab Spring revolutions, increased social fragmentation in the pan-Arab public sphere. As Bassam Badarin (2013), from *Alquds Arabi*, a London based newspaper, noted ‘when I watch Aljazeera I feel sorry for General Sisi (the leader of the military coup) when I watch al-Arabiya I feel sorry for Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood political party) and when I watch the Jordanian TV I feel sorry for myself’. In other words, the Egyptian public sphere has divided into allies and enemies of the Ikhwan rule. Nevertheless, on the third of July 2013, in the aftermath of the second military coup in Egypt which sent the elected president into jail, a third wave of social unrest erupted. In response the new military rulers have shut-down all opposition satellite channels, which are mainly the religious channels (e.g. al-Nas, al-Rahmah, al-Yarmouk, al-Quds) and have launched information warfare against their Facebook pages resulting in the shut-down of the largest Facebook page, ‘Anti-secularism’ (Mukafaha Elmanyah), which has over one million members. Further, the military has employed its information technology capabilities in order to control the society. They have succeeded in silencing the anti-military coup voices, manipulations and public distortions against Ikhwan by tagging them as terrorists. They have also engaged surveillance and DDoS attacks against their webpages. As Ned Rossiter notes in his book *Organized Networks*,

The society of control is accompanied by techniques of data surveillance such as cookies, authcate passwords, data mining of individuals and their informational traces, cctvs that monitor the movement of bodies in public and private spaces, and so forth [...] New information and communication technologies thus play a key role in maintaining a control society. (2006: 73)

Since then the Egyptian public sphere has become a sphere of struggle as the pro-Ikhwan movement has established a number of Facebook pages as alternative media in order to encourage political mobilisation and highlight the brutality of the military. As Bruce Bimber (2000) argues,

While online technologies contribute toward greater fragmentation and pluralism in the structure of civic engagement, their tendency to deinstitutionalize politics, fragment communication, and accelerate the pace of

the public agenda and decision making may undermine the coherence of the public sphere. (cited in Papacharissi 2010)

Overall, the emergence of a new Arab public sphere as a political space impacted on state-society power relations. The next section will analyse the impact of the new Arab public sphere on promoting democracy in the Arab world.

2.4 The Democratic Nature of the Arab Public Sphere

The potential for Internet communications to generate multiple public spheres and to promote democracy has been widely debated. In this context, Papacharissi (2010) suggests, ‘these multiple public spheres, though not equally powerful, articulate, or privileged, exist to give voice to collective identities and interests’. In his book *Postmodern Condition* Jean-François Lyotard (1984) stated, ‘Habermas overemphasized rational accord as a condition for a democratic public sphere’. He argued, ‘it is anarchy, individuality and disagreement that have and can lead to genuine democratic emancipation’ (cited in Papacharissi 2010). Chantal Mouffe, in her book *The Democratic Paradox*, argues, ‘democracy requires the existence of homogenous public sphere, and this precludes any possibility of pluralism’ (2000: 51). She also discusses the concept of ‘agonistic pluralism’, and about this says, ‘I have proposed to envisage democratic politics as a form of “agonistic pluralism” in order to stress that in modern democratic politics, the crucial problem is how to transform *antagonism* into *agonism*’ (2000: 117). Another concept she introduces is ‘deliberative democracy’, a need for power and antagonism to achieve adequate democracies. She writes:

[What] I am proposing here is the need to acknowledge the dimension of power and antagonism and their ineradicable character. By postulating the availability of public sphere where power and antagonism would have been eliminated and where rational consensus would have been realized, this model of democratic politics denies the central role in politics of the conflictual dimension and its crucial role in the formation of collective identities. This is why it is unable to provide an adequate model of democratic politics. (1999: 752)

With regard to Mouffe’s (2000, 2005) concept of ‘agonistic pluralism’ Papacharissi (2010) suggests ‘agonistic pluralism is formulated in contrast to the dialogic pluralism of the public sphere, and is aimed at radically transforming existing power relations’. Rossiter also critiques Mouffe’s concept and questions,

the extent to which Mouffe's concept of agonistic or pluralist democracy as a politics of legitimacy that enables 'the struggle between adversaries' rather than antagonistic struggles between enemies is relevant in any pragmatic sense within an informational age of network societies. (2006: 68)

Using these accounts to reflect on the Egyptian revolution 2011 it is clear that the dynamics of the Egyptian public sphere have transformed from private to public to chaotic. Under the influence of mass media a precarious public sphere has emerged and social media has played a key role in its emergence. Thus in the first wave of social unrest in 2011 the collected data (which is outlined in Chapter 4) suggests that, despite a multiplicity of forms, virtual public spheres have all been united in one common goal. Jodi Dean notes:

The multiple spheres approach suggest: the old pluralist conception of democracy in which various groups compete and compromise as equal players in a game of politics situated in a national, constitutionally determined arena. The multiple spheres approach reinforces the priority of a bourgeois or official public sphere as a goal site, as an ideal, as the fundamental arbiter of inclusion. Indeed, it tends to remain part of a collective will-formation rather than as a variety of multiple and conflicting processes of production, intervention, configuration, expansion, and exclusion. (2001: 249)

This mood, though, changed when the Ikhwan nominee was elected in the first democratic elections in Egyptian history. In a way at this time the agonistic plural sphere became the dominant sphere. Also, the historical antagonism between seculars and Islamists was again expressed and emerged in the new Egyptian public sphere. This occurred despite Mouffe's belief that the role of democracy 'is to transform antagonism into agonism' (2000: 103).

Chapter 4, and the data analysis presented there, suggests that the role of new media in second and third waves of social unrest is to transform agonism into antagonism. This transformation, however, was rendered into physical violence and thousands of lives have been lost. In other words social conflict emerging as a result of the elections has trapped the Egyptian public sphere in a perpetual dynamic of conflict and crisis and led to a transformation from the agonistic plural sphere into an antagonism sphere. The significance and uniqueness of the new spaces of social interaction, according to Veronica Alfaro, 'have the potential to not only articulate flows of communication – and thus becoming a sort of

public sphere – but also to become the stage of a new category of social movements and political action that is characteristic of the information society’ (2011: 10).

Today, the Egyptian scene (state vs. networks, networks vs. networks and networks vs. the state) demonstrates a shift in its power dynamics due to a shaping of these dynamics within ‘the struggle between adversaries’ in the networked public sphere. In this sense, Benkler highlights the,

increasing importance of the digital commons as a factor of information production would weaken the power of the state and of incumbent media to shape public debate and that radically decentralized, commons-based production by once passive consumers would enhance participation and diversity of views. (2013: 5)

Additionally, according to Geert Lovink, ‘the network form is imposed on all facets of power [...] Networks may dissolve old forms of power, the hierarchies and bureaucracies, but also install a new regime’ (2005: 9-10). Thus, to understand the role of media and networked social media in the emergence of new forms of power structures and the struggle between the adversaries to achieve political goals, it is essential to understand the communication theory of power that developed by Manuel Castells (2007, 2009).

2.5 Communication Power in the Networked Society

The purpose of this section is to examine the power of social media networks as an alternative media entity and medium of communication that has been harnessed by both civil society groups and authoritarians in order to extend their political domination over the other. This section is a literature review of digital ethnography, its methodologies and approaches, while Chapter Three is the outcome of the data analysis of social media platforms used during the Egyptian revolutions of 2011-2013 and will determine whether the new communication technologies fit into either what Larry Diamond (2010) calls ‘liberation technologies’ or what Evgeny Morozov (2011) calls ‘technologies of oppression’.

This section, therefore, attempts to foreground a response to the central question of this thesis: Does access to information communication technologies (ICTs) shift power from authoritarian regimes to social society actors?

In a study of communication power in a networked society it is tempting to only focus on the impact of the Internet and other technologies in terms of shifts of power from one player to another. The outcome of the Arab Spring uprisings have certainly shown that the power of communication wielded by pro-democracy activists has helped in the Arab Spring to overthrow four Arab dictators and to challenge the power of the rest of other Arab dictators.

Before examining this more closely, however, it is important to consider what power is.

Manuel Castells, in his book *Communication Power*, defines power as:

The rational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interest, and values. Power is exercised by means of coercion (or the possibility of it) and/or by the construction of meaning on the basis of the discourses through which social actors guide their action. (2009: 10)

During the Egyptian revolution of 2011 the first form of power to be contested was what Berment Tursunkulova calls 'the power of precented'. Tursunkulova suggests that, 'the successful revolution in one country is followed by a revolutionary movement in another' (2010: 349). As is widely known the Arab Spring started in Tunisia. Although the Egyptian digital activists have organised many virtual and actual sit-ins and mobilised thousands in rallies for Khalid Said's cause they have not been confident enough to mobilise millions in public squares. The Egyptian pro-democracy actors waited to see the outcome of the Tunisian uprisings and then announced through social media networks their 'day of protest', followed by a 'day of rage'.

The other form of power practiced by the Egyptian civil society actors was 'the power of networks'. According to Castells,

The nature of power in the network society is primarily exercised by the construction of meaning in the human mind through processes of communication enacted in global/local multimedia networks of mass communication, including mass self-communication. (2009: 416)

In his communication theory of power, Castells introduced four forms of power exercised in the networked society which are: networking power, network power, networked power and

networks making power. To understand the power relation dynamics between people in power and counter-power in the context of the Egyptian revolutions (2011-2013) a primary networks analysis of social media networks that challenged power holders is required (see chapter 4). In this sense, during the three waves of social unrest, revolutionaries and counter-revolution actors (the military and other interest groups) in order to achieve their political domination over the other have practiced two types of networks power. The first is 'networking power'. According to Castells (2009, 2011) networking power is 'the power of the actors and organizations included in the networks that constitute the core of the global network society over human collectives and individuals who are not included in these global networks'. During the three waves of social unrest, networking power was the dominant practice by the Egyptian revolutionaries that has shaped interaction between power and counter-power, influence and catalysed publics for collective action.

The second is 'networks making power' which according to Castells (2011) is 'the power to program specific networks according to the interests and values of the programmers, and the power to switch different networks following the strategic alliances between the dominant actors of various networks'. This form of power was widely practiced during the second wave of social unrest as these networks were employed by the military and its allies (as gatekeepers) to control the minds of the people, resulted in split the Egyptian society and the emergence of counter-revolution powers that aborted the outcomes of 'January 25' revolution. As Castells notes,

If power relationships are constructed largely in the human mind, and if the construction of meaning in the human mind is primarily dependent on the flows of information and images processed in the communication networks, it would be logical to conclude that power resides in the communication networks and in their corporate owners. (2009: 417)

Therefore, according to Castells, the 'media [has] become the social space where power is decided' (2009: 431-2). The pervasiveness and accessibility of social media networks among the Egyptian youth has made information reach the society at large. As Clay Shirky, in his book *Here Comes Everybody*, 'we now have communications tools that are flexible enough to match our social capabilities, and we are witnessing the rise of new ways of coordinating action that take advantage of that change' (2008: 20). The power of social media networks, mainly Facebook and Twitter, were harnessed by other pro-democracy groups a few years

before the Arabs used them. For instance, the Moldavian revolution in 2008 and the Iranian revolution in 2009 were widely known respectively as, ‘the first Facebook revolution’ and the ‘first Twitter revolution’ (Zuckerman 2011). In this sense, social media was seen as a source of empowerment. Although the Moldavian and the Iranian civil society actors didn’t achieve their goals (that is didn’t change the election results), these actors were seen as a threat to authoritarians. As Philip Howard noted, ‘new information technologies do not topple dictators; they are used to catch dictators off-guard’ (2010: 12).

The importance of information diffusion in shaping the state-society power relations is what Régis Debray (1987) observed:

We are witnessing a historic transformation of the traditional modes of power. Power today is becoming based less on physical and material parameters (territory, military forces) and more on factors linked to the capability of storing, managing, distributing, and creating information. (cited in Ronfeldt and Varda, 2008: 3)

Up until recently the people’s power was contested by state sponsored violence – a minimisation of information flows through intimidation, black mailing and arrests. Castells suggests that power relations are the foundation of social relations in all societies. He argues that whenever there is power there is also counter-power, so that societies are constructed on power relations and are always in competition (2009: 47-50).

Clearly, the outcome of the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 shows how broad access to social media networks by civil society actors helps to overthrow Arab authoritarian regimes and establish new democracies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (see for example, Castells 2012, Howard and Hussein 2011, Edmond 2011, Campbell 2011). As Philip Howard, in his book *The Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, suggests, ‘it is the relatively large internet and mobile phone user base – a wired civil society – that consistently serves as a causal condition across multiple democratization recipes’ (2010: 194). Thus there are casual links between access to ICTs and power shift dynamics.

Generally speaking, state-society relations have always been based on information communication dissemination. In open societies, or liberal democratic states, for instance, governments have less control over communication channels because of their compliance

with democratic values of human rights, public liberty and freedom of speech. On the other hand, the political power of authoritarian regimes is wielded by controlling all aspects of communication, that is, ‘control over state-media equals control over the state’ (Bowen 2010). For example, the Chinese government blocked access to Facebook, YouTube and Google in 2008-2009; it also censored online search words like Egypt, revolution and freedom after the Arab Spring sparked in 2011— in order to acquire more control over its society. Similarly Arab authoritarians have imposed surveillance and employed self-censorship over political web contents. For instance, the American based *Arab Times* online newspaper was blocked in most of the Arab countries because it was seen to criticise political leadership. Just viewing the newspaper by proxy could lead to prosecution.

In this respect, the question still stands: Does access to information threaten authoritarian control by shifting the balance of power between State and society? Harold Innis, in his book *Bias of Communication*, suggests, different media favoured different ways of organizing political power, whether centralized or decentralized extended in time and space and so on, was no doubt too crude to account for the complexities of the historical relations between communication and power (1951: 94-5). Innis provided a historical account to explain his theories and he wrote, the rise of printing industry represented the emergence of new centres and networks of symbolic power which were generally outside the direct control of the church and the state (1951: 138). Though, the rise of the printing industry in the 19th century is akin to the rise of social media in the 21st century, as both the printing and social media have loosen the power of the ‘symbolic controllers’. Additionally Manuel Castells, in his book *Power of Identity*, noted that ‘power is no longer concentrated in institutions (the state, organizations, capital firms) or symbolic controllers (corporates, media, church) it is diffused in global networks of wealth, power, information and images’ (1997: 359). Therefore, these global networks are born in the digital sphere and lead to the rise of information communication technologies. As Moises Naim notes, they ‘play [a] meaningful role in shaping access to power’ (2013: 447). Castells observes,

[T]he modes of existence of the state and its capacity to act on power relationships depend on the specifics of the social structure in which the state operates. Indeed, the very notions of state and society depend on the boundaries that define their existence in a given historical context. And our historical context is marked by the contemporary processes of globalization and the rise

of the network society, both relying on communication networks that process knowledge and thoughts to make and unmake trust, the decisive source of power. (2009: 16)

Thus, according to Castells, power making in the networked society ‘proceeds by shaping decision-making, either by coercion or by the construction of meaning, or both’ (2009: 189). In Egypt this manifested with the power of the Egyptian government and the civil social actors being assigned according to two main forces: ‘the rise of mass self-communication and a state monopoly of violence’ (2009: 51). This means there has been three major shifts in power during the three waves of social unrest that took place in 2011-2013. These power dynamics can be described as frameworks: networks vs. the state; networks vs. networks and the state vs. networks.

2.6 Networks vs. the State

Recently the role of ICTs in social uprisings has become very clear. Through access to social media networks, smart-mobs, and weblogs social activists have used a media revolution to have a profound impact on authoritarian regimes that have little or no regard for their people. The advent of ICTs has therefore transformed structures of power and challenged established power. The first power struggle which emerged as a result of the social unrest in Egypt can be described as ‘networks vs. the state’.

Empirical research has shown that access to ICTs shifted the balance of power from Arab authoritarian regimes to civil society actors in the first wave of social unrest in 2011 (e.g. Campbell 2011, DSG 2011, Howard and Hussein 2013, Lotan et al.,2011). The rise of Web 2.0 technologies such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, Denial Drezner suggests, ‘provided civil society activists with additional mechanisms for coordinating social action’ (2010: 34). Clearly the Facebook page ‘Kullena Khaled Said’ pre-announced the ‘day of rage’ on Jan 28th 2011. This was after its successful call for the ‘Jan 25th’ protest day which resulted in President Mubarak being overthrown. In 2011 the ‘Kullena Khalid Said’ Facebook page had just over a million members. Now the page has over three million members, making it the largest social media network in Egypt. Having such a large membership the page shifted the balance of power in the interest of the social actors. Therefore as Castells notes:

[I]n a world marked by the rise of mass self-communication, social movements and insurgent politics have the chance to enter the public space from multiple

sources. By using *both horizontal communication networks and mainstream media to convey their images and messages*, they increase their chances of enacting social and political change – even if they start from a subordinate position in institutional power, financial resources, or symbolic legitimacy. (2009: 302)

The first wave of social unrest in 2011 was characterised by an excessive use of social media that politically mobilised the public, allowed activists to coordinate protests and generally informed the world. The Facebook pages engaged in Castells calls ‘networks of outrage and hope’ played a crucial role in shifting the balance of power in the interest of social actors. These Facebook pages were: ‘Kullena Khalid Said’, its English version ‘We Are All Khaled Said’, and April 6 youth movement. In regards to Twitter two hashtags, hashtag #Jan25 and #egypt, received millions of tweets that interrupted the State’s monopoly over information dissemination. As Castells, in his book *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, stated, ‘it began on the internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that had monopolized the channels of communication as the foundation of their power, throughout the history’ (2012: 2).

While the Egyptian government had the capacity to censor and control information flows in the early days of digital activism it didn’t interrupt them. As Omar Suleman, the head of the Egyptian intelligence, said ‘let the kids play with their tools [...] they’ll get bored and go home’ (cited in Ghonim 2012: 286). In this regard, Drezner suggests:

At moments when a critical mass of citizens recognizes their mutual dissatisfaction with their government, the ability of the state to repress can evaporate. In some cases of ‘people power’ mobilization, government-controlled media outlets have often switched sides and supported activists against repressive governments such moments dramatically increase the state’s price of using coercion to reassert political control. Role of new media – be it Twitter or text messaging – has the potential to be even more significant. (2010: 40)

In short, ‘networks of outrage and hope’ were the decisive factor that led to triumph in the first wave of social unrest in Egypt. This was possible because the expansion and capacity of these networks were beyond the Egyptian government’s imagination and therefore control.

When the government cut-off the entire internet connection to hinder information flows, other actors stepped in. Anonymous, Telcomix, and Aljazeera employed their technological capacities in order to maintain the information torrent. The Google and Twitter corporations even revealed their roots in hacking by creating the ‘speak2tweet’ communication channel. The battle in the first wave, therefore, was over the control of media messages, a situation which empowered social actors more than the state. As Ronfeldt and Varda suggest, ‘information and communications flows appear to be a powerful instrument for compelling closed societies to open up’ (2008: 28).

2.7 Networks vs. Networks

As the first wave of social unrest in Egypt was marked with ‘networks of outrage and hope’, the networked social movements succeeded in dismantling social barriers and created a homogeneous public sphere which resulted in the end of the authoritarian regime and promoted democracy. Dissatisfaction with the new elected president, Mohammed Morsi, who belonged to the Islamic Brotherhood political party named Ikhwan, though, caused a second wave of social unrest. Secular parties, the Coptic Church, pro-Mubarak allies, people with economic interests in Egypt, corporations and people of political ambition created ‘the national salvation front’ (Jabhat elengath). This party was led by prominent political figures such as Mohammed ElBaradei and Amro Mossa. This movement was also supported by the main players who led the ‘Jan 25’ revolution, particularly the Facebook pages Kullena Khaled Said, April 6 youth movement and Keyfaya movement.

This new political faction also propagated the violent groups called ‘the black block’ and ‘Tamarod’ (Rebellion). Additionally with regards to Ikhwan some new Facebook pages have emerged such as (Mukafahat Elmanyah) anti-secular, (Wathaeq Wikileaks) WikiLeaks documents and the ‘White Block’. As a result, the Egyptian public sphere has fallen apart and the conflictual atmosphere reflected on the democratic transition that evolved in post ‘Jan 25’ revolution. Information flows have come to suffer a lack of objectivity, and have become dominated by mistrust, falsification, and distortions against opponents. Media campaigns were organised to attack Ikhwan mainstream media and vice versa; the call for political mobilisation and the promotion of hate speeches and violence became the common trend. As Ronfeldt and Varda noted, ‘a society may become structured into new kinds of classes depending on one’s relation to the means of production of information’ (2008: 35-6).

The second wave of social unrest, therefore, has been marked with the emergence of new tendency towards a fascism and extremism in opinion that in this thesis I call 'networks of antagonism and hate'. The transformation of networks of 'outrage and hope' into 'networks of antagonism and hate' divided the power between social society actors and led to a second military coup on the third of July 2013. This was after over 20 million people mobilised around Egypt calling Mohammed Morsi to step-down. The clash of networks, however, resulted in the death of democracy, split the society at large and raised many questions about the role of new media in liberating societies and promoting democracy.

2.8 State vs. Networks

As the second wave of social unrest was characterised by a clash of networks and the emergence of networks of antagonism and hate, the military coup of July 2013 has proven that the state monopoly of violence is more powerful than any social network, no matter how big it is. As Castells notes:

Political violence is a form of communication by acting on the minds of people through images of death to instill fear and intimidation. This is the strategy of terrorism, which resorts to spectacular manifestations of random destruction to induce a permanent state of insecurity among targeted populations. Violence, broadcast over the communication networks, becomes the medium for the culture of fear. (2009: 417)

The new military rulers, led by General Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, first controlled the media in order to control the society. In a leaked video by Rassd News Network (RNN), on 1st October 2013, the military leaders are shown discussing how to sway news media. One officer is shown saying that in any state, 'there are red lines to protect the armed forces from the media, and the truth is we have enjoyed this protection for 50 years'. The high ranked officer then suggests that one way to create these red lines is to develop 'a dialogue with those people in an unannounced way, individually, to persuade or intimidate those people'. This conversation foreshadowed the broad media crackdown that has played out since the military takeover. The new military rulers have shut down over twenty Islamist television networks and the main newspaper supporting Ikhwan. The police have also detained several journalists perceived as being critical of the government or the military. Further, privately owned newspapers and satellite networks now resound with cheers for the army while demonising Islamist opponents. This situation is just as officers depicted in the video hoped.

In regards to social media networks the ‘Kullena Khalid Said’ Facebook page has been silenced even though it was a neutral player during the second wave of social movements. The last post on this page was on 4th of July 2013. On the other hand, the new military rulers have harnessed the power of mainstream media to convince the world that 30th of July was a revolution not a military coup. The closure of the opposition mainstream media, though, has resulted in the emergence of a number of counter-power Facebook pages. In response to this the military rulers have established new Facebook pages in order to launch information warfare. As Ronfeldt and Varda states:

Citizens are not the only ones active in cyberspace. The state is online, too, promoting its own ideas and limiting what the average user can see and do. Innovations in communications technology provide people with new sources of information and new opportunities to share ideas, but they also empower governments to manipulate the conversation and to monitor what people are saying. (2008: 12)

On August 14, 2013 the military and security forces brutally cleared the two mass sit-ins in Rabea Adaweah and Alnahdah squares that supported the ousted President. Thousands of people were killed in what Human Rights Watch described as a massacre and as ‘the most serious incident of mass unlawful killings in modern Egyptian history’ (cited in the Nation 2013). These brutal killings of Muslim Brotherhood allies in public squares caused a swath of political movements organised via Facebook pages calling for the return of the legitimate President. In order to contain the outrage the military have used excessive force to suppress and brutally kill opponents. As explained by Zbigniew Brzezinski the political advisor of President Obama:

In early times, it was easier to control a million people; literally it was easier to control a million people than physically to kill a million people. Today, it is infinitely easier to kill a million people than to control a million people. It is easier to kill than to control. (2011: np)

Today social media networks are used by both sides of the conflict. The weekly call for mass mobilisations is the common activity in the social media sphere. As Diamond notes, ‘Democrats and autocrats now compete to master these technologies. Ultimately, however, not just technology but political organization and strategy and deep-rooted normative, social, and economic forces will determine who wins the race’ (2010: np). Furthermore, there is

increasing evidence that repressive regimes are exchanging not only best practices in digital repression but also the underlying customised software used for surveillance and censorship (Morozov 2011). The widespread use of ICTs can therefore empower coercive regimes at the expense of resistance movements. As Morozov notes:

If, on closer examination, it turns out that the Internet has also empowered the secret police, the censors, and the propaganda offices of a modern authoritarian regime, it's quite likely that the process of democratization will become harder, not easier. (2011: 27)

The complexity of the current events in Egypt, in regards to power relations, shows that the harnessing of social media by both the regime and social actors in order to achieve their agendas is a complex and still to be fully understood phenomenon.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined how social media platforms emerged and subsequently a new Arab public sphere. The latter, during the first wave of social unrest in 2011, shifted the balance of power in favour of Egyptian civilian activists. As I go on to consider in this chapter, though, since this time social media networks have multiplied and come to divide Egyptian society through what I call a 'clash of networks'. As a result of this situation new power structures have emerged and new struggles been identified which can be summarised as networks vs. the state, networks vs. networks, and the state vs. networks.

Chapter Two has also been a focus on how pro-democracy actors, who previously were the target of state-led violence, have gone on to use social media networks to strengthen democratic tendencies. As outlined above, the Egyptian social media landscape, as it exists today, highlights how state sponsored violence increases people's participation in political mobilisation, increases sympathy among opposition groups (for example, the emergence of 'Christians against coup' group) and helps to expose the regime's actions at both local and international levels. The data analysis in Chapter Four will examine the extent of these power relations and determine whether technology is a source of empowerment or repression. The next chapter, however, will shed light on the role of external actors and illuminate some of the ways in which they have contributed to the quest of civilian activists to resist authoritarian regimes

CHAPTER 3

THE POWER OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

3.1 Introduction

Based on the literature review of Chapter Two, we can see that state-society relations have been influenced by power relations and the emergence of the new Arab public sphere.

WikiLeaks, Aljazeera and Anonymous have joined the technological battle over surveillance, censorship and information dissemination and in doing so have empowered Arab social actors while hindering these actors' governments. A consideration of the creation and dissemination of information is very important when determining whether information communication technologies have shifted the balance of power from authoritarian regimes to social actors. These social actors, and their use of communication technologies, have contributed significantly to the events of the Arab Spring uprisings and an understanding of this makes clear why recent revolutions have come to be known as 'WikiLeaks' and 'Aljazeera' revolutions.

The technological roots of the Arab Spring uprisings have compelled other external actors to support Arab digital activists in their battle for freedom and social justice. The unbalanced power relations between the social actors and their authoritarian regimes has forced 'hactivist' groups such as Anonymous and Telcomix, the independent Satellite channel Aljazeera and the whistle-blower site WikiLeaks, to intervene in the technological and media monopoly of authoritarian regimes for the purpose of social good. The affiliations between the new rivals are intertwined and oxymoronic. The collaboration between Anonymous and WikiLeaks is actually historical because they were sharing 'hactivism' roots. For instance, Anonymous initiated 'operation payback' against Amazon.com, MasterCard and Visa after these corporations, pressured by the US government following the cable revelations of 2010, failed to provide donation services to WikiLeaks (Ferdiani 2013: 364). Further, WikiLeaks benefited from hacked information accessed by Anonymous because it allowed them to enrich their content even though the information was illegally stolen from private emails. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Anonymous declared operation Tunisia (#opTunisia) and operation Egypt (#opEgypt) after both the Tunisian and the Egyptian regimes cut WikiLeaks from their servers. This cut resulted in retaliation in the form of attacks being launched against governmental websites through the breaking of information dissemination from these sites and capacity of Arab digital activists to evade surveillance and censorship. This has resulted in the situation where WikiLeaks and Aljazeera have labelled the Arab Spring as 'Aljazeera' and 'WikiLeaks revolutions'. Aljazeera is seen as the only free press in the Arab world that played a key role in expanding the geographical space of the uprisings and raised

awareness. Arab authoritarians see Aljazeera as the catalyst for political mobilisation and as a consequence it has been widely criticised in the mainstream media, attempts were made to halt its Satellite feed, Aljazeera staff were harassed and arrested and the bureau offices were closed.

Ironically, although Aljazeera and WikiLeaks were used as weapons by Arab revolutionaries to highlight the Arab regimes' corruption and brutality to local and World audiences, Aljazeera did not broadcast the contents of the 'Cablegate' which was released by WikiLeaks in 2010. Observers say Aljazeera did not wish to embarrass the Qatari royal family who were unfavourably depicted in the cable revelations (Lynch 2010). The timing of the WikiLeaks cable revelations was appropriate given that the Arab streets were dominated by corruption, unemployment and poverty. The external actors, though, are often considered a united force in empowering and inspiring the Arab public and in helping to shift the balance of power from authoritarian regimes to the people.

In this chapter each external actor is examined in order to understand how it contributed to the narrative of the Arab Spring uprisings. First, WikiLeaks is reviewed because the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, claimed that Wikileaks initiated the Arab Spring uprisings in acting as the catalyst for political mobilisation and in raising awareness through the 'Cablegate' revelations. Second, Aljazeera Satellite channel is examined and the role it played in creating political and social change in the Arab World. Aljazeera is also studied for how it shifted the balance of power from authoritarian Arab regimes to the people. Finally, hacktivist groups (Anonymous and TelcominX) are considered and how they allowed Arab digital activists to evade surveillance and how they empowered civil society actors by establishing internet connections that could evade information communication barriers imposed by the Arab regimes during the uprisings.

3.2 The Role of WikiLeaks

Since the cable revelations of late 2010 – widely known as 'Cablegate' – by the controversial whistle-blower website WikiLeaks, a new narrative of political debate has evolved in the sphere of online media in the Arab World. Some hundreds of cable releases have highlighted the corruption of most of the Arab regimes, including the lavish and extravagant lifestyle of their members and their future plans to stay in power. Two weeks after the releases, the Tunisian uprising erupted, followed by wave of protests in Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria. A key question to ask, therefore, is whether WikiLeaks revelations fuelled the

social and political movements on the Arab streets? Was it the catalyst? Is WikiLeaks part of ‘the new Arab public sphere’? And why is the WikiLeaks debate so important in the Arab Spring context? The time of the information releases created such debate and questioned the role of WikiLeaks in the uprisings even though commentators such as Elizabeth Dickinson (2011), in *Foreign Policy Magazine*, called the Arab Spring ‘the first WikiLeaks revolution’. She noted:

Tunisians didn't need any more reasons to protest when they took to the streets these past weeks – food prices were rising, corruption was rampant, and unemployment was staggering. But we might also count Tunisia as the first time that WikiLeaks pushed people over the brink. (2011: np)

Studying the WikiLeaks cable releases in the context of the Arab Spring is as important as studying other ‘digital commons’, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube which have supplied a human narrative of the activities and effects of oppressive regimes in the Arab world, and which have helped dissidents to organise protests, to amplify voices and to fight for freedom and democracy.

WikiLeaks is an international non-profit organisation founded by Julian Assange in 2006. As described by Morozov it is ‘electronic drop-box technology that allows leakers to submit documents anonymously’ (2010). WikiLeaks presents itself as a truly independent media organisation. As stated on WikiLeaks.org, its objective is ‘to be of assistance to people of all regions who wish to reveal unethical behaviour in their governments and corporations’ (WikiLeaks 2013). WikiLeaks relies on the power of overt fact to enable and empower citizens to bring feared and corrupt governments and corporations to justice (WikiLeaks 2013). Assange described WikiLeaks as being ‘engaged in a [...] generational struggle for a proposition that citizens have a right and a duty to scrutinise the state’ (cited in Terry and Rui Liu 2011). While the *New York Times* portrayed WikiLeaks as a ‘tiny online source of information and documents that governments and corporations around the world would prefer to keep secret’ (cited in Benkler 2011), WikiLeaks acted as a secure medium that enabled whistle-blowers to disseminate classified information. It became a domain where ‘truthful speech’ could be collected and safely published (Sateur and Kendall 2011). Today, with authoritarian governments in power in much of the Arab world and with increasing authoritarian tendencies in other democratic countries, the need for openness and transparency is greater than ever. In regards to the Arab Spring, WikiLeaks challenged the

power of states by disseminating classified information and thus facilitating a freedom of information flow that destabilised the political and economic status of authoritarian regimes. Generally it was used as a political tool or weapon in the lead up to democratic change. An analysis of the Arab ‘Cablegate’ is important for understanding the correlation between the free flow of information and political change.

3.2.1 The Arab ‘Cablegate’

Among the 2,500 cables released by Private Bradley Manning (now Chelsea Manning) in November 2010, there were approximately 17 releases written by US ambassadors to Egypt and Tunisia. I will present the cable revelations as a contributing factor that played a role in catalysing the Arab public outrage during the events of the Arab Spring uprisings. The first release contained 10 cables issued from the US Embassy in Tunisia. The majority of these cables showed exchanges between the embassy and the US State Department. The classified documents were transmitted between May 28th, 2008, and February 9th, 2010 (WikiLeaks 2013). Two of the documents were written by the present Ambassador, Robert Godec, while the remaining eight were written by his predecessor William J. Hudson. As noted earlier in this research, Tunisia was the first country to rise up against its entrenched dictator and it inspired other Arab populations to challenge the existing power holders. The time of the WikiLeaks revelations was pivotal in initiating Tunisian political mobilisation. Below is an examination of leaked cables that may have played a role in fuelling the Arab streets.

Cable (1) this cable highlights the corruption of Bin-Ali and his family. It was classified by Ambassador Robert F. Godec:

According to Transparency International's annual survey and Embassy contacts' observations, corruption in Tunisia is getting worse. Whether its cash, services, land, property, or yes, even your yacht, President Ben Ali's family is rumoured to covet it and reportedly gets what it wants. Beyond the stories of the First family's shady dealings, Tunisians report encountering low-level corruption as well in interactions with the police, customs, and a variety of government ministries. the economic impact is clear, with Tunisian investors – fearing the long-arm of "the family" – forgoing new investments, keeping domestic investment rates low and unemployment high (Refs G, H). These persistent rumours of corruption, coupled with rising inflation and continued unemployment, have helped to fuel frustration with the GOT and have

contributed to recent protests in south-western Tunisia (Ref A). With those at the top believed to be the worst offenders, and likely to remain in power, there are no checks in the system. End Summary (WikiLeaks 2013).

Cable (2): A cable which reports the visit to Tunis of assistant Secretary of State, David Welch. This visit was for talks with Bin-Ali about terrorism and other issues. Bin-Ali pledged ‘to cooperate with the United States without inhibitions.’ This language has gruesome implications, given the widespread use of torture by both Tunisian and American interrogators (WikiLeaks 2013).

Cable (3): Reports that the government of Tunisia was pressuring European countries to not take Tunisian detainees from Guantanamo in order to ensure they are delivered to Tunisian custody. The cable cites comments by British and Canadian ambassadors that Tunisia routinely tortures prisoners.

Cable (4) The US ambassador exposes the corruption of Bin-Ali’s wife, Leila Trabelsi: ‘Ben Ali’s wife, Leila Bin Ali, and her extended family, the Trabelsis, provoke the greatest ire from Tunisians’. ‘Along with the numerous allegations of Trabelsi corruption are often barbs about their lack of education, low social status, and conspicuous consumption’ (WikiLeaks 2013).

The content of the cables demonstrates why the US government was so furious about the leaks and why it is seeking to prosecute Assange and halt WikiLeaks’ exposures. The revelations have had a political impact in undermining the Bin-Ali regime and contributing to the mass demonstrations that ousted the dictator.

3.2.2 ‘Nawaa’ Activism

These cable leaks, however, didn’t exhibit anything new to the Tunisian public or even to the outside world. The portrayed actions of Bin Ali’s regime were well known to almost everyone in Tunisia. But what WikiLeaks presented that was new to Tunisians, and which consequently fuelled their anger, was the scale of corruption, and this was a scale which was beyond people’s imagination. The government’s wrong doings were exposed to the Tunisian people, and what was exposed has since shaped the public opinion expressed in social media networks. For example, the Tunisian digital activist, Sami bin Garbia, has created a web page called ‘TuniLeaks’ which is connected to the notorious blog post called ‘Nawaa’, and on which are posted the cable revelations concerned with Tunisia which inform most online Tunisians after the Tunisian regime shut down WikiLeaks from its servers.

‘Nawaa’, which in Arabic means ‘the core’, is an independent and political group of people who expose the cables found by Sami bin Garbia in 2004. It aims to provide a public platform for Tunisian dissent; it aims to provide a voice and a site for debate (Nawaa 2013). This collective blog has gathered all leaked cables from WikiLeaks and made them available to the Tunisian public through its ‘Tunileaks’ link. Additionally, ‘Nawaa’ has played an important role in the Tunisian uprisings because it was the first site to upload the Bouazizi self-immolation images and make them available for its Facebook members. From Facebook Al-Jazeera satellite picked up these images and made them available to the world and this resulted in the public outrage of the Arab world at large. Rebecca MacKinnon (2012), in her book *Consent of the Networked*, suggests:

The information published by Nawaa and Tunileaks is believed by diplomats, human rights groups and journalists who have since gone back and analysed the Tunisian revolution[,] to have contributed in no small part to Tunisians’ rejection of the Bin-Ali regime (2012: 16).

Some other cables that were released were the confidential ones written by Margaret Scobey, the American ambassador to Cairo, ‘Mubarak would prefer to die in office rather than step down’. Scobey also wrote, ‘The next presidential elections are scheduled for 2011, and if Mubarak is still alive it is likely he will run again and, inevitably, win’. She continued ‘if Mubarak died in office, the presidency would likely go to his son, Gamal’ (WikiLeaks.org 2013). Once again, this was not exactly news to the Egyptian people (cited in Bachrach 2011) but one of the released documents highlighted the US government’s role in Egypt and their especial relations with Egypt. The cables also revealed Omar Suleiman’s secret police involvement in the US CIA special rendition programme and the CIA’s candid assessment of his abilities to lead as a potential Mubarak successor (Campbell 2011). Again, these revelations didn’t add anything new to the Egyptian public’s existing knowledge of the regime’s political agenda. Nevertheless WikiLeaks received outrage and condemnation from Arab leaders, along with the US counterparts. In a televised speech, Muammer Qaddafi was the first Arab leader to denounce WikiLeaks, (he referred it to as Kleenex), ‘even you my Tunisian brothers, you may be reading this Kleenex and empty talk on the internet [...] shall we become the victims of Facebook, Kleenex and YouTube.’ Secretary Clinton condemned WikiLeaks calling it ‘a threat to the international community’ (cited in Benkler 2011). As a result, the Tunisian and the Egyptian governments switched off WikiLeaks from their servers before they decided to cut-off the entire internet connection.

3.2.3 WikiLeaks and ‘The New Arab Public Sphere’

Jürgen Habermas, in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), proposed that,

social institutions, such as the mass media, have played a critical role in enabling citizens to debate matters of public significance, and through such debates a rational-critical discourse has emerged allowing the public and their participation to have an influence upon the conduct of the state. This better secures the relationship between the promises of liberal democracy, its potential empowerment of citizens, and the practice of public institutions.

(cited in Flew and Rui Liu 2011: 1)

WikiLeaks has engaged the Arab public in arguments about domestic politics and given these publics a platform to voice their concerns. According to Lynch (2006) ‘the Arab public sphere’, along with WikiLeaks, has transformed Arab political culture and shattered the states’ monopoly over the flow of information. It has forced Arab leaders to justify their position more than any time before. Additionally, Lynch suggests that the rise of the ‘new Arab public sphere’ will ‘fundamentally challenge the power of Arab states and force the demands, interests and concerns of an engaged publics onto every political agenda’ (2012:166). Lynch also states that,

the free flow of information and the explosion of public discourse and open debate have shattered one of the core pillars of the authoritarian Arab systems that evolved over the 1970s and 1980s: their ability to control the flow of ideas and to enforce public conformity’. (2012: 181)

WikiLeaks, therefore, has created a space where public opinion is shaped. This has empowered social actors and digital activists to raise direct criticism of their leaders in the digital space. In this space ordinary people can be informed of the political status of their country, and their interest is particularly captured when releases contain classified information because it provokes people to read, to discuss and to debate. Assange’s leaked information is seen to be symptomatic of the power of an individual communicating across a network that makes individuals inherently more powerful than ever before. As Benkler, et al. argued,

the increasing importance of the commons as a factor of information production would weaken the power of the state and of incumbent media to shape public debate and that radically decentralized, commons-based production by once passive consumers would enhance participation and diversity of views. (2013: 5)

In response to the leaked cables, several Arab governments such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia counter reacted creating an information curtain to prevent revelations from reaching the Arab populations at large. First, they ordered mainstream Arab media corporations not to report the WikiLeaks revelations or if they did report it to generalise it. Second, they shut-down WikiLeaks from their servers; the Tunisian government also shutdown Tunileaks and the Lebanese al-Akhbar online news for highlighting the cable releases (Bin Gharbia 2013). Al-Jazeera did not report the cable releases because, according to Lynch (2010), they sought 'to protect the Qatari royal family'. If they had reported the releases they could have been viewed as being in sympathy with the 'Arab street' and thus not independent. But in November 2009 a cable was released that was about Aljazeera, and with this Robert Booth (2010) from *The Guardian Newspaper* believed the station could be used 'as a bargaining tool to repair relationships with other countries, particularly those soured by Al-Jazeera's broadcasts, including the United States'.

Overall, WikiLeaks has created debate and thus contributed to 'the new Arab public sphere'. WikiLeaks empowered individuals to participate in the collective action that rocked the Arab world. Despite this empowerment, though, it is important to examine the truth of the so-called 'WikiLeaks revolutions'? Did the cable revelations fuel the Arab streets or is it a WikiLeaks fallacy?

3.2.4 'WikiLeaks Revolutions' Truth or Fallacy?

In the MENA region, WikiLeaks is viewed as a hacktivist group who claims the agitation of the Arab Spring revolutions. Julian Assange, the co-founder of the whistle-blower website, called the Arab Spring uprisings 'WikiLeaks revolutions' (see for example, *Democracy Now* 2011, *Hindu Times* 2011). During an interview by Amy Goodman of *Democracy now* (2011), Assange claimed that 'in the Arab World WikiLeaks raised awareness on key issues and highlighted the fact that the US was equally conscious of such matters. And that the release of these cables played a key role in sparking the wave of protests in the Arab world'. However, the talk of a WikiLeaks revolution is as of that Twitter, Facebook and Aljazeera

revolutions, but WikiLeaks revelations about what the US know of the Arab regime's widespread corruption.

The belief that WikiLeaks played a vital role in the Arab Spring, however, is widespread. WikiLeaks was described by Rebecca MacKinnon as being 'a kind of digital commons that [...] played a vital part in facilitating the Arab Spring' (2012: 673). Benkler claimed that WikiLeaks is part of 'networked public fourth estate' (2011: 2). As Benkler puts it:

by harnessing the established fourth estate to its materials, WikiLeaks received accreditation and attention, and was able to exercise power over the public sphere well beyond what it could have commanded by a single document dump on its own site, or an edited set of its own. (2011: 17)

Dickinson (2011) claimed she believed this was the case, 'because the former President Bin Ali's ruling family was described as mafia-sequel elite who have their hands in every cookie jar in the entire economy'. *The New York Times* and *Foreign Policy* magazines suggested that 'WikiLeaks cables blunt descriptions of the corruption of Tunisian President Bin Ali helped fuel the revolution that ousted him in January 2011' (cited in Benkler 2011: 8). So while some may disagree most concur that WikiLeaks did contribute to the harsh reaction of the Tunisians against President Ben Ali's regime.

WikiLeaks publishing of the Iraq and Afghanistan war logs and the classified embassy cables has opened up a new paradigm for political activism through the World Wide Web. Many versions of WikiLeaks have since emerged, such as Openleak, Ruleak (Russia), Indoleak (Indonesia), Arab-WikiLeaks and Tunileaks (Tunisia). Such copycat sites have provided the public with useful information and a transparency to a degree that they have become a force for democracy. According to Burak Gumus et al., 'the rise of both (SNSs) users and of their cyber activism can be contested in Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi-Arabia, the Emirates, Algeria, Jordan, and of course in Libya, where uprisings and revolts are organized' (2011: np). Another example of demonstrators using the Web to communicate is the creation of a website called Arab-WikiLeaks (Arabwikileaks.alafdal.net), which collects the leaked diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks that concern the Arab world. The documents include those about human rights violations in the Arab world and the censorship of free speech. The site has also led to the development of a Facebook page called Wathaeq WikiLeaks, or WikiLeaks documents, which supports democracy in Egypt. Similarly the Tunileaks website (Tunileaks.app.com) was designed to disseminate and discuss the Tunisian-related US cables

and was described by Bin-Ali's information Minister, Oussama Romdhani, as 'the coup grace, the thing that broke the bin-Ali system' (cited in Bin Gharbia 2013).

The talk of 'WikiLeaks revolutions' in the Arab Spring context has created paradox and debate among prominent political figures. For example, the Former Tunisian UN Ambassador, Ahmed Ounaies, stated on BBC World News (2011) 'the reports published through WikiLeaks [...] played a role in the upsurge'. Contrary to this Secretary of State Spokesperson, Philip Crowley stated, 'Tunisia is not a Wiki revolution. The Tunisian people knew about corruption long ago. They alone are the catalysts of this unfolding drama' (cited in Bachrach 2011). While Dickson (2011) argued, 'WikiLeaks acted as a catalyst: both a trigger and a tool for political outcry. Which is probably the best compliment one could give the whistle-blower site'. In tribute to Chelsea Manning, who for her role in the leaks has been sentenced to 35 years in jail by the US military court, Sami Bin Gharbia (2013), who masterminded Tunileaks, stated, 'she has given us, Arabs, the secret gift that helped expose and topple 50 years of dictatorships'. In his recent article 'Chelsea Manning and the Arab Spring', Bin Gharbia demonstrates how WikiLeaks contributed to the Arab Spring uprisings, suggesting the 'revolution will be WikiLeaked'. He noted:

we managed to disseminate the cables as a PDF, other sharing services, on torrents and it even ended up on Facebook as images, spread further by 'Slacktivists'[sic] likes and shares. Tunisian activists crowd-sourced the translation of the most sensitive and scandalous cables into French and Arabic. The translations were disseminated by hundreds of guerrilla networked activists and non-activists both online and offline. By early December the information that dictatorship has worked so hard to block and control was everywhere, snowballing. From business managers to vegetable sellers, everyone had heard of Tunileaks. The rich and complex propaganda machine of Bin Ali couldn't do much to restore [a] tarnish[ed][sic] image. It was collapsing. It was only matter of days. (August 2013)

In fact Mohammed Bouazizi didn't set himself on fire after he heard about the WikiLeaks revelations. Even before the cable releases Bouazizi wasn't the first Tunisian or Arab to burn himself alive as a means to protest humiliation and police brutality. The burnings and protests were also started because of the self-indignation, the unemployment and the poverty. These were the roots of the uprisings but it is indisputable that the leaked controversial documents

angered the Tunisian and other Arab publics, particularly because they were tangible evidence of the lavish lifestyle and corruption of the Arab leaders.

The leaked WikiLeaks cables substantiated the facts of what many Tunisians and other Arab people thought was going on in their countries. First, the sheer extent of the corruption in Tunisia where the Bin-Ali and the Tarabolsy's families were shown to have controlled most of the country's wealth. Second, the non-governmental control that Ben Ali's family exerted over the country. Third, the fact that the US's involvement in the torture of political detainees and the human rights abuses involved were classified as secrets. Fourth, the degree of the intelligence sharing between Tunisia and the US. Finally, the political ambition of the Bin Ali and Mubarak regimes who were making plans to transform their republics into monarchies.

Information flows are important when seeking political change and the promotion of democracy. As Tony Benn (2011) stated, 'leaks of information about what the government is doing should be seen as an advantage in democratic terms'. To explore the role of WikiLeaks in autocratic countries, Sateur and Kandall argued the revelation of information governments strived to keep secret provides political fuel for activists who emphasise 'the important role of truth telling as a political practice today' (2011: np). This is what Michael Foucault calls *Parrhesia* (truth telling). According to Foucault truth telling is a 'political practice that [can], in a restricted way, challenge power and effect change'. He adds further that 'not only was *parrhesia* the basis of freedom, freedom was the basis of *parrhesia*' (Foucault 2010: 66 cited in Sateur and Kandall 2011).

In short, there are mixed ideas about the emergence of WikiLeaks. In the Arab world, WikiLeaks and Assange were hailed as heroes and freedom fighters and were given as much credit as al-Qaeda and Bin-laden. In America Joseph Biden, the US vice president, declared that WikiLeaks leader, Assange, is a 'digital terrorist'. Also Senator Joe Lieberman declared WikiLeaks 'illegal, outrageous and reckless acts [which] have compromised our national security and put lives at risk around the world' (cited in MacKinnon 2012: 150)

In the Arabic networked public sphere WikiLeaks cable releases have occupied a large space and opened up a new paradigm for Arab civil society, the opposition and online citizen media initiatives who have used the leaked information in their favour to push for real change. WikiLeaks has played a central role in shaping the minds of Arab youth and is seen as a source of empowerment in uniting their common grievances. Like WikiLeaks the Al-Jazeera network has also played a significant role and this is explored below.

3.3 The Role of Aljazeera Satellite

During the events of the Arab Spring uprisings the Doha-based satellite channel Aljazeera played an important role in information production and diffusion and in doing so it empowered members of Arab civil society but it disempowered governments (See for example, Castells 2012, Lynch 2012, Plunkett and Halliday 2011, Hijawi 2012, Howard and Hussein 2013). Information production and dissemination are central for power and domination when Arab authoritarian regimes and dissents fight to control media messages. The independent satellite channel Aljazeera broadcast the uprisings in the Arab empowering cyber-dissents because it broke the state-controlled information dissemination barrier. This explained how power shifted from the few to many. The purpose of this section is to answer the following questions: How did Aljazeera transform the power dynamics? Would the revolts have happened without Aljazeera?

Under the scrolling banner ‘Arab Spring tsunami sweeps the region’, Aljazeera, which in Arabic means ‘the island’, broadcast live minute-by-minute footage of what was happening in the Arab world during the events of the Arab Spring uprisings. Since its initiation in 1996 by the financial help of the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani, Aljazeera, with its media work in Arab countries, has created a ‘media revolution’ in a time when this was extremely difficult. According to Nihad Ismail, Aljazeera,

was like a media earthquake that opened up the gates of freedom of expression and democracy. The clash of opposing views, criticism of governments and rulers were welcomed by audiences throughout the Arab world. It has succeeded in winning opinions as well hearts and minds. (2011: n.p.)

Wadah Khanfar, the former head of Aljazeera, describes the channel as a ‘phenomenon’. He suggests, ‘[w]hen it was established in 1996 it was an exception within the Arab media landscape’ (TED 2011). As a consequence Aljazeera was seen as a threat to the authoritarian Arab press and to the United States’ foreign policy because it became an outlet for public opinion and then inevitably became part of ‘a new Arab public sphere that would inevitably challenge the pillars of Arab authoritarian domination’ (Lynch 2012: 68). Aljazeera was also seen as a threat to America’s propaganda during its war in Afghanistan commencing in 2001 and its war in Iraq commencing in 2003. During these years it was often called ‘the mouth piece of al-Qaida’ in the Western media. As a consequence it was banned and its media

coverage was excluded in a number of Arab countries. Further, Aljazeera bureau offices were bombed by the US in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite these imposed restrictions Aljazeera has changed the political dynamics and media structure of the Arab world because Arab populations have perceived tuned in to Aljazeera at the expense of the BBC and CNN channels. Before Aljazeera these two channels were widely respected and trusted in the Arab world even though their coverage represented a western point of view. Lawrence Pintak suggests that in the case of pan-Arab media, ‘the media both shapes and mirrors public attitudes’ (2011:45). This is especially true for Aljazeera which ‘reframed – and in many cases created – the debate’ (2011: 47). Overall, across the MENA region Aljazeera was widely perceived as primary source of credible news network and role player in diffusion of information. It also seen by Arab social actors as a source of empowerment ‘that helped them to create new linkages among civil society actors within and between countries’ (Howard and Hussein, 2013: 1454).

3.3.1 The Power Making News Network

When investigating social media in the political uprisings of the Arab world it is clear that satellite channels such as Aljazeera and al-Arabiya played a significant role in shaping the socio-political change that took place in the Arab world since 2011, and it continues to play a role. Being the most adapted and autonomous news organisation in the Arab world, Howard and Hussein argue that Aljazeera ‘not only raised its profile as a credible news organization but also increased its clout as political actor [...] in several parts of the region’ (2013: 258). During the events of the Arab Spring uprisings, Aljazeera played a crucial role in amplifying social media narratives internationally as social media alone as a medium of communication wasn’t enough to spread the word of democracy, to mobilise publics for political action and information dissemination. Despite being rivals there is a de-facto relationship between social media networks and satellite channels who have worked in concert with each other to produce and diffuse information. As Mark Lynch wrote, ‘Aljazeera, Satellite television, Facebook and Twitter bound together these national struggles into a single, coherent narrative of an Arab intifada’ (2012: 2025). Furthermore, Timothy Ash noted, ‘Aljazeera heavily relied on referencing Facebook pages and YouTube in reporting the raw events’ (cited in Manhire: 5795). Aljazeera also depended on Twitter feeds when breaking news. For example, Aljazeera captured a Twitter stream from Tahrir square which was communicated by on-the-ground activists and which, after going through an authentication process, is diffused.

Actually when comparing the role of social media during the Arab uprisings with the role Aljazeera played during the same time it is clear that in countries like Libya and Yemen social media was not as powerful in acting as a catalyst for public political mobilisation and empowering the people. Aljazeera actually played a more significant part during the Arab Spring uprisings in facilitating change and shifting the power dynamics of politics.

In Tunisia the information cycle in the early days of the uprisings was critical in expanding the demographic space of protests and in raising awareness. At this time Aljazeera was at the centre of the events and it was the first satellite channel to broadcast worldwide what was happening in Tunisia even though it had been banned from operating in the country because of its direct criticism of Bin-Ali's regime. For example, the self-immolation of Bouazizi, in his home town of Sidibouzed, was first captured by a mobile phone camera and then uploaded to Nawaa-Facebook page. It was then picked up by Aljazeera satellite channel which broadcast it worldwide. Therefore, although Aljazeera was not necessarily the first to capture the images it was the strongest link in terms of information dissemination, and this was generally the case in the early days of the social uprisings in Tunisia. See figure 3.1



(Figure 3.1): shows the information cycle during the Tunisian revolution 2011

The New York Times observed how the channel's coverage had, 'helped propel insurgent emotions from one capital to the next' (27 January 2011). It also expanded the geographical space of protests throughout the MENA region. As Atef Hijjawi, the Arabic Program Director of Aljazeera, noted:

Aljazeera was quick to take a stand supporting Tunisian protesters and their demands. As demonstrations intensified, the station dropped its regular scheduling and opted for an open news cycle, which broadcast news and images from Tunisia as they came in online. The Tunisian audience followed their revolution on Aljazeera – the station was already popular in Tunisia before the revolution, due to the absence of trustworthy local media. (2012: 70)

In regards to Egypt Manuel Castells outlines the role played by Aljazeera during the Egyptian revolution:

Aljazeera was critical in its continuing reporting on the uprisings against the regime. The movement was kept informed by images and news received from Al-Jazeera, fed from reports by telephone on the ground. (2012: 63)

This point of view was echoed by Khanfar who stated that, ‘the people on the streets are our reporters [...] we are going to spread the message [...] Aljazeera took the voice from those people and amplified it’ (TED 2011). During the Egyptian revolution in 2011 the Egyptian government attacked Aljazeera HQ in Cairo and arrested its correspondents. At this time, though, Aljazeera’s cameras were broadcasting live from Tahrir Square which was considered the safest place for activists in Cairo. After the Aljazeera headquarters in Cairo were attacked the station launched the Aljazeera Mubasher Channel to broadcast live 24/7 from Tahrir Square. Like Aljazeera, Aljazeera Mubasher was seen as a threat to the Egyptian government and its control over information dissemination and propaganda. The channel, helped in catalysing publics for political mobilisation because it reached populations in remote areas who weren’t digitally connected. This resulted in the geographical expansion of protests across Egypt, and particularly so because mainstream media failed to compete with Aljazeera Mubasher and it lost the trust of the populations within its broadcast range. For instance, while Aljazeera was broadcasting live from Tahrir square showing millions of people protesting Egyptian mainstream media screened images of the same Tahrir square but from 2010 when only a few hundred people were protesting. The Egyptian government therefore engaged in information warfare against Aljazeera in an attempt to hinder its efforts in showing what was really happening. Even after Aljazeera’s offices were shut down and it was assumed the channel ceased operation, it was still broadcasting. This frustrated the Mubarak regime so they cut-off its satellite link which was hosted by the state-owned satellite called ‘Nilesat’. This resulted in the channel being blacked out for a few hours until some

other satellite channels offered their satellite link on the EU Sat-link. Despite the blackout Aljazeera online and YouTube channel continued broadcasting and kept people updated.

3.3.2 Aljazeera vs. the Military Regime

During the second and third waves of social unrest in Egypt Aljazeera played a pivotal role in broadcasting the struggle between people in power, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) and its legitimately elected President Mohammed Morsi, and counter-power forces, represented by seculars, the Coptic Church, and other groups with particular political and economic interests. Aljazeera has therefore been central in the political struggle between those responsible for the pro-military coup and the Ikhwan sympathisers. Aljazeera was directly involved in the second and third waves of unrest for two reasons. First was a type of revenge for the bad treatment shown towards the satellite channel during the first wave of social unrest. Second, was the need to support and defend the Ikhwan after the military regime closed down all opposition channels. Third, was the obligation to counter the antagonism of the Saudi based satellite channel, Al-Arabiya, which supported the military coup and played a crucial role in disseminating hatred towards the Ikhwan. Finally, was the necessity of easing the political discomfort between Egypt and Qatar because the military regime froze all economic agreements between the Egyptian and Qatari governments, agreements that had been signed by the legitimately elected President (Morsi). The direct involvement of Aljazeera provoked the military regime to arrest most of Aljazeera's staff members, to confiscate their equipment and to freeze their satellite link. The military also blocked Aljazeera from sending out raw TV feeds of the Egyptian crisis to other broadcasters.

Since the third wave of unrest the tension between Aljazeera and the military government has continued to escalate because Aljazeera has produced some documentaries which reveal the many thousands of people killed – that is, the massacres – which occurred as a result of the military's response to the massive sit-ins in Rabea Adawea and Alnahda squares. This tension was even evident in the arena of sport broadcasting. During the World Cup qualifying soccer game between Egypt and Ghana, held 25 October 2013, the broadcasting rights, which for World Cup soccer games were always exclusive to Aljazeera, were diverted by the military regime to the Egyptian national TV channel. This move was made because Aljazeera tend to broadcast the massacre documentaries during the half time period of broadcast soccer

matches. Aljazeera had done this in an attempt to defame the military and to gain the sympathy of the large portion of Egyptian society who only watched state-controlled media.

More recently Aljazeera has made use of all possible broadcasting channels to highlight the brutality and human right violations being committed by the military regime. Also, many of Aljazeera's broadcasting shows, such as 'The Opposite Direction' and 'Witness on the Revolution' now have hosts who expose secret deals, such as the deal made between Egypt and the State of Israel in terms of the protection of borders and ports. Today the media scene in Egypt can best be described as consisting of a state media allied with Facebook pages (which are a part of the networks of antagonism and hate) and private Egyptian satellite channels. This is very different from its past manifestation which consisted of Aljazeera and few Facebook pages, both of which acted as a voice for the dissidents.

3.3.3 The Aljazeera Effect

The emergence of Aljazeera in the Arab world and then its central role in the events of the Arab Spring uprisings has meant that the high profile satellite network has gained the trust and acceptance of a large portion of the Arab population. This is because it has acted as a voice for the voiceless. According to Nouriddine Miladi:

an estimated [...] half of the Tunisian television audiences watch satellite TV. Al Jazeera Arabic reaches 70 million households, mostly in the Middle East and North Africa; employs more than a thousand staff and have 70 foreign bureaux. Its website now receives more than 22 million visitors a month. (2011: n.p.)

During the events of the Arab Spring uprisings, Aljazeera was hailed as a hero were protesters lifted banners praise the channel for being the voice of the dissidents. As Wael Ghonim acknowledges on the impact of Aljazeera,

The channel's talk shows offered heavy criticism of many Arab leaders. Within a few short years, Aljazeera became the most viewed channel in Egypt and the entire Arab region. The network set an example that has been followed by many channels throughout the Middle East. (2012: 38)

Aljazeera contributed to the Egyptian revolutions of 2011 and 2013 in a number of ways. First, the channel raised an awareness of the governments' brutality by screening 24/7 live

broadcasts during the 18 days of turmoil in 2011. *The New York Times* praised the channel's coverage saying it was the 'total immersion coverage of news events the whole world is talking about' (cited in Manhire: 6368). For example, Aljazeera broadcast what was called the 'Camel Charge Massacre' when the military killed over 400 protesters and injured thousands. This coverage canvassed the world's attention and resulted in governments of the world pressuring the Mubarak regime to step down.

Second, Aljazeera acted as the voice of activists in its dependence on 'citizen journalism' reports which were delivered to Aljazeera through the platform *Sharek.aljazeera.net*. According to Nouriddine Milad, 'Aljazeera heavily relied on referencing Facebook pages and YouTube in reporting the raw events' (cited in Manhire: 5795). Khanfar explained that the Station aimed to be fair and accurate while ensuring that the voice of the people was heard, 'It merely allowed the voices of the people to be heard by integrating the social media with the main stream news gathering methods' (Khanfar 2012). He also noted that, 'its coverage has been instrumental in the toppling of the Tunisian President Ben Ali, the Egyptian President Mubarak, and Gaddafi of Libya' (Khanfar 2012). According to Saghieh (2011), 'Al-Jazeera is the most influential [political] party in the Arab World' (cited in in Pintak: 47-8). Further, Nihad Ismail (2011) suggests, 'It had successfully rumbled the dictators and shaken the regimes'. And as Pintak (2011) wrote, 'unlike the bland, state-owned Egyptian station, or its more conservative, Saudi-owned rival Al Arabiya, Aljazeera has captured the hopes of the crowds gathering on the streets of Cairo'.

The third way Aljazeera contributed to the Egyptian revolutions of 2011 and 2013 was the way in which it challenged the domination of state-controlled media in large parts of the Arab world. Prior to Aljazeera State-controlled media was preventing people from seeing the large spontaneous upheavals that were erupting in many locations in the Arab world. The emergence of Aljazeera dismantled the barrier blocking information dissemination and in doing so challenged the censorship and propaganda of many Arab regimes. As a consequence Aljazeera has shaped the minds of the Arab youth and imbued it with power. This is because most news reported by Aljazeera was, and continues to be, produced by on the ground protesters, a scenario which disrupts the state's monopoly over information dissemination and consumption and which has meant that Aljazeera is now widely accepted as a credible news source in the Arab world. According to Mark Lynch (2011) Aljazeera is part of the 'new Arab public sphere' and it has shattered a number of Arab authoritarian regimes. According to Souag, the head of Aljazeera's Arab programs, the real impact of the Aljazeera network

was the way it shaped Arab opinion in the years running up to 2011: ‘We provided Arab citizens with knowledge and information, [political] positions and ideas ... when you give people the right information you empower them’(cited in Ismail, 2011). Further, Hunter said:

Social media [...] was a successful catalyst when combined with myriad methods of digital and traditional media. Technological advances like cell phones, video cameras, blog posts and Facebook, in conjunction with more traditional media outlets like Aljazeera, created the circumstances for such effective information dissemination. Aljazeera and other pan-Arab satellite channels transmitted everything to the greater public – reaching in the end, a worldwide audience (cited in Pintak, 2011: 57).

Fourth, Aljazeera’s broadcasting to a global audience has increased world political pressure and as a consequence minimised casualties. This role was most significantly played by Aljazeera English (AJE) which amplified the voices of Egyptian digital activists. According to Khanfar (2013) ‘people in Tahrir appealed to Aljazeera not to switch off cameras, otherwise it will be genocide [...] you are protecting us by showing the world what is going on al-Tahrir Square’. Aljazeera’s live broadcasting has resulted in NGOs and world governments’ calling for the Egyptian regime to suspend its brutal acts and to peacefully hand over power. As a consequence of this Aljazeera has come to be seen as a source of empowerment and autonomy and as an organisation that spreads the word of democracy. As Philip Sieb, in his book *The Aljazeera Effect*, writes ‘it changes the way states and citizens interact with each other and it gives the individual a chance at a new kind of autonomy at least on the intellectual level, because of the greater availability of information’ (2011:175). Similarly, Pintak suggests: ‘Satellite TV’s grand opening of the marketplace of ideas was an important first step in the process of democratization, but it was just that – a first step’ (2011: 47).

There is no doubt, therefore, that Aljazeera played an important role in the events of the Arab Spring uprisings. Lynch argues that (2011), ‘it’s almost impossible to imagine all this happening without Aljazeera’. But was Aljazeera the driving force behind the Arab Spring? According to Khanfar it would have happened regardless of Aljazeera but, ‘it would have maybe been much more expensive – in terms of lives lost – and would have taken much longer to accomplish’ (cited in Hasan 2011). During the Bahraini uprisings Aljazeera was accused of being biased and its coverage controversial. This accusation, however, was waged

by the Syrian and Iranian regimes who supported the ‘Shia’ protesters. Khanfar (2012) defended the channel’s coverage of the Bahraini uprisings, dismissed the allegations and emphasised that the channel stood for both ‘the opinion *and* the other opinion’. Along with Aljazeera the emergence of pan-satellite channels and other ICTs have caused the Arab government increasingly lost control of information and thus their power. As Mubarak told one diplomat, ‘this is why I no longer have the control over the country that I once had’ (cited in Howard and Hussein 2013: 1436). Other external actors again, such as Anonymous and Telcomix, changed information dissemination, censorship, and surveillance, empowering pro-democracy activists while diminishing the power of authoritarians.

3.4 Hactivism and the Arab Spring Uprisings

The technological battle between authoritarian Arab governments and pro-democracy protesters existed long before the Arab Spring began. Facebook pages in Tunisia and Egypt were closely monitored, online censorship was strong and a number of online sites were spied on because of their involvement in the labour demonstrations held in Tunisia and Egypt in 2008. In December 2010, in the wake of the Tunisian uprisings, the Tunisian government launched an information warfare campaign against WikiLeaks. They blocked WikiLeaks’ access to its servers preventing it from leaking sensitive information and exposing the corruption of Bin-Ali’s regime. This situation, however, provoked digital hacktivists, (hacker activists) – a term coined in 1996 by ‘Omega’, a member of a group of internet hackers who called themselves ‘The Cult of the Dead Cow’. Elinor Mills (2012) defined hacktivism as ‘the use of legal and/or illegal digital tools in pursuit of political ends’. These hacktivist groups, which are leaderless, aim to protect the free flow of information on the internet. Their mission was clearly stated on the Anonymous website, ‘We want transparency and we counter censorship [...] this is why we intend to utilise our resources to raise awareness, attack those against and support those who are helping lead our world to freedom and democracy’ (Anon’s.org 2013).

Tim Jordan and Paul Taylor, in their book *Hactivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause*, have documented the hackers’ activity and its effect on the twenty first century’s movements suggesting, ‘these hacktivists seek to radicalise hacking’s original obsessions with information freedom and access by creating tools that ensure cyberspace remains a place where information is freely and securely available’ (2004: 4). Examining hacktivism and its involvement in social movements is significant and important. As Jordan and Taylor notes,

[A]s a movement it deserves attention because it is situated where it is; drawing in powerful alternative visions of society, arming these visions with informational tools and injecting itself as a radical virus into twenty-first-century societies.(2004: 165)

Progressing from organising anti World Trade Organization (WTO) popular protests, to the Zapatista movement in Mexico, to the Arab Spring uprisings and then establishing Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movements, hacktivists have mounted online and offline protests ‘that struggle to keep cyberspace free of corporate and state domination’ (Jordan and Taylor, 2004: 164). The digital roots of the Arab Spring uprisings though, have brought the attention of hacktivist groups to support Arab civil society actors in the information warfare against their governments. The importance of hacktivists’ direct involvement in the events of the Arab Spring uprisings was for a number of reasons. First, hacktivism has dismantled the barrier of information production and dissemination by creating more options. Second, hacktivism has empowered social actors by shifting the balance of power from governments to activists by enhancing the latter’s communication technology usage and by trying to paralyse governmental communication facilities. Finally, hacktivism validates the theoretical grounds of this research which centres on ‘communication power’. As Castells suggests, ‘the rise of mass self-communication [...] increases the ability of us, the audience, to produce our own messages, potentially challenges corporate control of communication and may change power relations in the communication sphere’ (2009: 422). But like Aljazeera above the question arises: to what extent does hacktivism support the pro-democracy protesters in the Arab world? What are the implications for authoritarian Arab governments?

3.4.1 Acting Together: Anonymous and Telcomix

During the Arab Spring uprisings Anonymous and Telcomix received a great deal of media coverage in both the Arab world and internationally (Aljazeera 2011, Olson 2012). Despite the differences between the two groups – Anonymous uses destructive methods while Telcomix is more creative in their approach – the two rivals have coordinated their efforts to aid Arab digital activists in their virtual war against their regimes. But who are Anonymous and Telcomix and what are their agendas? According to Ferdiani, ‘Anonymous is a galaxy of individuals who find themselves attracted by the same forces [...] that are created and undone according to their interests or personal interactions’ (2013: 112). Anonymous themselves have specified that, ‘we are not hackers, or terrorists but ordinary citizens who decide to take

the virtual streets to demonstrate' (Ferdiani 2013: 386). Meanwhile, Telecomix represent themselves as a 'sociocyphernetical telecommunist feminist cluster of internet and data loving bots and people, always striving to protect and improve the internet and defend the free flow of data. Telecomix, just like the Internet, knows no borders technological or territorial' (Telcomix.org 2013). As the Arab pro-democracy activists used Facebook to promote demonstrations and Skype to avoid tapped cell-phones, their governments have in turn boosted online censorship and spying. It is at this point that hacktivists stepped in. Massive cyber-attacks were launched against the regimes of Bin-Ali, Mubarak and Assad during the uprisings, and these attacks gave the revolutionaries superior control of information flows. Digital hacktivists brings together technical experts, and increasingly, activists with the common aim of uniting in non-violent but often illegal action. As Jordan and Taylor noted,

Hactivism is the emergence of popular political action, of the self-activity of groups of people, in cyberspace. It is a combination of grassroots political protest with computer hacking. Hacktivists operate within the fabric of cyberspace, struggling over what is technologically possible in virtual lives, and reaches out of cyberspace utilising virtual powers to mould offline life. Social movements and popular protest are integral parts of twenty-first-century societies. Hactivism is activism gone electronic. (2004: 1)

During the events of the Arab Spring, Anonymous collaborated with Telecomix and created #op Tunisia on the 2nd Jan 2011 and #op Egypt on January 27, 2011. The aim of these operations was to supply Tunisian and Egyptian activists with essential technological tools by using proxy modems to re-establish internet connections and to evade surveillance. The question that arises, however, is did the collaboration between civil agents and hacktivist groups become a powerful agent for change? Or was the role of hacktivists merely to exaggerate statements about impacts?

In the case of the Arab Spring, an example of a hacktivism practice which challenged authoritarian was the employment of digital technology tools such as 'Low Orbit Canon', 'Dial-up Access' and 'The Onion Router' (TOR) which were harnessed to bring about social and political change. The battle over information production and diffusion was also important for the embattled parties. Both parties fought to control the digital media sphere, it became information warfare. This warfare was first waged by the Arab authoritarian governments against the cyber-dissidents. This took the form of hacking their emails, reporting the

dissidents' Facebook pages as spam, pressuring web administrators to close pages and the posting of disinformation by cyber-police. The second wave of information warfare was waged by hacktivist groups who sought to place protesters one step ahead of the authorities in terms of access to information and who aimed to challenge the monitoring strategies used by the governments. These actions empowered the civilian activists in their battle for freedom and democracy. For example, Anonymous hosted sites on Facebook that aimed to promote rallies in Egypt. These pages provided protestors with an alternative means of connecting to the internet. In Syria Anonymous hacked Facebook and Google pages so they could inform Syrian social media users that they were being monitored and so they could provide information on how to evade Syria's internet police (Sterner 2012).

Amnesty International, in its 2011 report, focused on the 'critical battle [that is] under way for control of access to information, means of communication and networking technology.' In an interview with Aljazeera, Wendy Brown, the director of international law and policy at Amnesty International, noted:

Anonymous outrage over government and corporate pressure against WikiLeaks underlined the hotly contested power dynamics that surround information. Amnesty considers the use of non-conventional methods by cyber-activists in defence of these principles as justified, so long as they are not violating other people's legitimate right to privacy and security. (cited in Aljazeera 2011)

In order to recruit other members to join their cause hacktivist groups created what they call 'operations'. The word 'operation' reinforced the idea that they weren't just engaging in a protest or anarchy, what they were doing was a mission (Oslo 2012: 135). Any Anon member could create and name the operations simply by accessing the IRC Anonymous channel. For example, long before the developments of the Arab Spring Anonymous waged 'Operation USA', and 'Operation Payback'. When the events of the Arab Spring started to unfold Anonymous commenced one of its largest operations called 'Operation Egypt' (#Op Egypt).

3.4.2 Operation Egypt

As noted earlier, during the Arab Spring uprisings Anonymous set up a number of operations – #Op Tunisia, #Op Egypt, #Op Libya – to coordinate attacks with affiliated hacktivist

groups and to recruit more anonymous individuals to get involved by following the progress of developments and to focus on prime targets.

In this section of the thesis I will focus on #Op Egypt as it was the main case study used in this research. On Jan 25, 2011 Wael Gohnim, the creator of the famous ‘Kullena Khaled Said’ Facebook page that pre-announced the Jan 25 day of protest succinctly tweeted, ‘I just have been contacted by Anonymous, I have been told that they are going to launch attacks against the Egyptian government websites’. Operation Egypt was not announced at this point, though, but after the Egyptian government shut down the entire internet and all mobile phone services on 27 January 2011. This was the day before the ‘day of rage’ when millions of people were invited to participate in protests in Tahrir square to force Mubarak to step-down. At this point Anonymous posted on their website, social media (Twitter) and IRC channel a warning message to the Egyptian government that said, ‘if you shut down the internet we will shut you down’. Also at this time Anonymous collaborated with Telcomix to create dial-up internet access in order to re-connect on the ground digital activists and to stop information flows from being distracted. According to the Piratepin pad (online crowd sourcing hypertext), hacktivists created 42 dial-up access points for Egyptians to re-connect to the internet, see Figure 3.2.

| Confirmed dial-up number user names and passwords | Dial-up accounts at XS4ALL Internet in Amsterdam |
|--|---|
| +3908251872424 no auth needed | phone: +31 20 5350535 |
| +3909241962424 no auth needed | gypt0037 navsked |
| +16033715050 any user/pass | gypt0038 pakdeop |
| +4721405060 any user/pass | gypt0039 hikosca |
| +431962962 selfnet selfnet | gypt0040 pivenst |
| +492317299993 telecomix telecomix | gypt0041 icervat |
| +4953160941030 telecomix telecomix | gypt0042 instron |

Figure (3.2) Piratepade.de: dial-up access numbers and authentications

A problem, though, was determining how to inform fellow Egyptians of these connections? Through Piratepin pad one Anon suggested, ‘Get the following info out to Egypt in any way you can; Fax, phone calls, ham radio, and fucking carrier pigeons. Go go go!... please Fax these’. According to Asokan (2011), ‘Telecomix set up dial-up connections using two servers in Europe. The members then faxed the dial-up numbers to every Egyptian office, university

and coffee shop they could find'. Then Anonymous sent a plea to all al-Nour server users who lived near Tahrir Square asking them to unlock their key passwords. Al-Nour was the only server the Egyptian government didn't cut-off because they were (and still are) the service provider of the Egyptian stock exchange. The dial up connections allowed the digital dissidents to keep tweeting and thus stay connected with the world.

At this time Anonymous also quickly created a 'care packet' which offered digital activists advice on how to conceal their identities on the web and thus avoid detection by the former regime's online police which also including methods of non-violent tactics of civil-disobedience based on Gene Sharp (1973,1993) thoughts. Anonymous also launched Distrusted Denial of Service attacks (DDoS) against the governmental websites. DDos attack is an attempt to make websites or network resource unavailable to its intended users and they disrupt but don't destroy target sites. Information is not stolen, but the volume of requests sent to the sites causes them to shut down and thus prevents anyone from gaining access. Anonymous have claimed that they have taken down approximately 25 governmental websites, including the cabinet and the stock exchange (annonnews.org 2012). Along with this Casserly said (2011) that, 'Anonymous and Telecomix worked hard to ensure that the footage of protesters clashing with aggressive government forces in the streets reached audiences outside the country'.

Operation Egypt was, and still is, viewed by many Anons as a success. From the beginning Anons and other protestors decided not to attack media or to promote violence, unlike the situation being created on many Cairo streets as a result of the actions of the Government (Anonymous.org 2012). A question that remains, however, is to what extent did Anonymous' involvement in Egypt shift the balance of power existent between the government and the social actors? An examination of hacktivists' engagement in the Arab Spring and the outcomes of this engagement helps answer this question.

During the Arab Spring hacktivists used fax machines to spread information about protests to schools universities, factories, hospitals and offices. What impact Anonymous' faxes had at this time is not clear because when the faxes were sent thousands of young Egyptians were already on the streets protesting – not sitting in their offices waiting by the fax machine.

Another activity of the hacktivists during the Egyptian Arab Spring was that they paralysed most governmental webpages. I believe this tactic was weak for two reasons. First, these types of (DDoS) attacks, as noted earlier, are ineffective because the problem can be fixed

within hours and no sensitive information can be stolen from websites. Second, in the Arab world generally (except in the Arab Peninsula), and in Egypt in particular, there are no e-government initiatives which make webpages valuable for both citizens and governments. Thus government webpages are disregarded by Egyptian people at large. The attacks, however, seemed to have damaged the digital property of the Arab authoritarian regimes and thus these actions have formed part of the cyber-conflict between hacktivists and the government.

The third activity the hacktivists engaged in during the Arab Spring was using tech support (dial-up connections) and The Onion Routers (TOR) to continually tweet the revolution to the world while avoiding censorship and surveillance. This action had a number of affects. It raised awareness by disseminating information. It allowed the Arab digital activists to learn of a lot of external moral support which meant they no longer felt alone in their battle with their governments. The digital activists were therefore empowered and this shifted the balance of power in their favour. Through information dissemination and raised awareness tech support was extended to Syrian activists and this facilitated the smuggling of technological devices, such as satellite phones, into Syria. This too allowed information to be disseminated out of that country, which was particularly important since the regime was targeting digital activists and killing them (Shehabat 2013). Generally, hacktivist groups have helped to spread the word of democracy, human rights, civil liberties and social justice. Such groups played a crucial role in the organisation of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement in the US, which ultimately led to the emergence of over 2,600 occupy movements Worldwide. Finally, hacktivists have changed ideology and particularly the fear of cyber-attacks and political criticism. The Arab Spring and its repercussions has meant that hacktivists groups such as Anonymous have grown in member numbers and to such a degree that they no longer fear government retaliation and they actually has pre-announce their attacks. Anonymous has therefore grown not just in numbers but in geographical extent. For example in 'Operation Israel' over 15,000 Anons participated in the biggest ever operation in July 2013 that led to the paralysis of most of the country's servers.

Hacktivist groups such as Anonymous, however, do not only show a united front and networks that seem ubiquitously supportive and united do portray conflict, or what in this thesis I call 'networks of antagonism and hate'. While some Anons support democracy, others, and in particular # operation Egypt of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan), have used their digital activism to attack democracy in Egypt. As a consequence other Anonymous

groups have made Ikhwan Websites their prime targets. According to one Egyptian cyber-terrorist, who administrated the Anonymous Egypt Facebook page, 'we have hacked into 35 Ikhwan websites'. The conflict within Anonymous has led to a moral and ethical questioning of whether the group truly defends freedom and democracy or whether it just consists of a bunch of cyber-thugs who dwell under the umbrella of Anonymous and conduct illegal acts on behalf of the group. That is, a group that really does live by its motto: 'we don't forget, we don't forgive, except us'.

3.5 Conclusion

In Chapter Three I have outlined the importance of external actors, such as WikiLeaks, Aljazeera and Hactivist groups, who have been key players who have empowered civilian activists while working against the actions of governments. As the battle between the government and activists concentrated on information creation and dissemination, the actions of outside actors was critical for maintaining the free flow of information. Chapter Three has also been an exploration of the problematic of Khanfar's and Assange's claim that the Arab Spring was an Aljazeera and WikiLeak revolution.

CHAPTER 4

INFORMATION WITHIN A REVOLUTION: THE ROLE OF WEB 2.0 PLATFORMS

4.1 Introduction

Social media networks played a significant role in the events of the Arab Spring uprisings of late 2010 and early 2011 and they have thus been a central focus of recent media studies.

Although Web 2.0 platforms working alongside activists achieved what the latter hoped for in the first wave of social movements in Egypt in 2011, since the revolution social media has begun to display a darker side. During the second and the third waves of social unrest, in 2012 and 2013, social media networks have been used against civil society groups and this has resulted in the split of Egyptian society into two groups. One group is supported by the Muslim Brotherhood and represented by elected President Mohammed Morsi. The second group is supported by the Egyptian military regime and is represented by General Abdulfattah el-Sisi. This rupture created a new form of autocracy during the second wave of unrest which subsequently led to a third wave of unrest and a renewed quest for democracy.

Web 2.0 platforms, which proliferated in 2004, led to a new paradigm of social interaction which was beyond the imagination of the original web creators. The term ‘Web 2.0’, according to Wikipedia, was coined in 1999 by Darcy DiNucci; it was then popularised by Tim O’Reilly at the O’Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in late 2004. Web 2.0 is basically a trend in the use of World Wide Web technology and web design that aims to enhance creativity, information sharing, and collaboration among users. The concept has led to the development and evolution of web-based communities and host services, such as social networking platforms, wikis, and blogs. In regards to popular social uprisings such technology is important, not only because of its self-generated content, but because it facilitates participation and global connectivity. Tim O’Reilly claims that Web 2.0 technology allows ‘the former audience, not a few people in a back room, [to] decide ... what's important’ (2005: 3). Further, in the December 2006 issue of *Time* magazine, in light of the emergence of the Web 2.0 platform, ‘YOU’ was named the person of the year, because as it says in the headline, ‘You. Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world’. Although Web 2.0 started as a business model, social scientists, scholars and activists now use the term when discussing the use of ICTs in popular social movements (Papacharissi 2010, Ghonim 2012, Darwich and Lakhitrija 2011, Castells, 2008, 2012). The widespread use of ICTs and social media applications in the MENA region have therefore opened up a new realm of political activism that has played a crucial role in the pervasive social uprisings and political mobilisations that led to the downfall of the Mubarak, Bin-Ali, Qaddafi and Saleh

regimes in 2011 (Anderson 2011, Ghareeb 2011, boyd 2011, Khamis and Vahugen 2011, Dabashi 2011, Lynch 2012, Aday et al. 2011)

This chapter explores what role Web 2.0 platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, played in organising and catalysing publics into political mobilisation in the waves of social unrest that rocked Egypt in 2011 to 2013. It also examines how the use of Web 2.0 technologies affected the power relations in Egypt between the state and civil society advocates. In this chapter the study of the importance of information dissemination through social media networks will highlight the effect of the emergence of Web 2.0 applications and how they contributed to social and political change in Egypt. The factors outlined above will be examined in three steps. First, a study of the scholarship on the role of social media networks in the Egyptian revolution. Second a focus on the characteristics of each individual social media platform and how it contributed to the social unrest in Egypt. Third, I examine Facebook data sets that were generated when the balance of power shifted between the Islamists and liberals during the second and the third waves of social unrest as the two groups sought to rule the country. Finally, I highlight the clash between social media networks and mainstream media networks as the latter have also used Facebook as a medium for information disseminations.

4.2 The Impact of Web 2.0 on the Egyptian Revolution

Since the Arab Spring uprisings broke out in Tunisia and Egypt in late 2010 and early 2011, social media platforms have been heralded as instrumental in facilitating the uprisings.

Howard and Hussein, in their book *Democracy Fourth Wave*, write:

In the years leading to the Arab Spring, the diffusion of digital media, in the form of mobile phones, personal computers and software applications, had a significant impact on the systems of political communication in the countries where civil society was allowed to use such tools and in the countries where governments set the terms of technology access. (2013: 729)

The internet and social media networks, therefore, were playing a significant political role in the Arab world prior to the events of the Arab Spring. In the Arab world the first recorded collective use of both the internet and social media networks was in Lebanon in 2005 and then in both Egypt and Tunisia in 2008. The events of March 2005 in Lebanon were seen by

many observers as a turning point in the fight for democracy and as a consequence this period is marked as the first wave of the Arab Spring (Achcar 2005). In 2005 the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, prompted a massive public outrage with people demanding that Syrian troops leave Lebanon. According to Walid Pharis (2012), ‘the protestors used cell phones, email, and public announcements to mobilise people to attend the demonstrations and vigils that took place at various locations around Beirut every day’. In Egypt and Tunisia the youth of the countries were the first to harness the power of Web 2.0 platforms for political activism. For example when more than 200 striking textile workers in Mahala El-Kubra, north of Cairo, were massacred by the military on 6 April 2008, a youth movement was born in Egypt. This group, called the ‘April 6 youth movement’, played a key role in mobilising over 60,000 people through its Facebook page calling for the condemnation of the killings and protesting against the regime’s brutality (Campbell 2011). It was this youth movement which ended up being one of the key players in the events of ‘January 25’ revolution that ousted Mubarak. Like this movement activists protested in 2008 in Gafsa, east of Tunis, using Facebook and blogs to raise awareness. This movement was labelled the ‘Revolution of Bread’ when ‘none of the mainstream media would cover them’ (Laipson 2011: 78).

The rise of social media platforms has empowered and transformed Egyptian political activism into political outcomes. During the three waves of social unrest, information production and dissemination were the decisive factors that facilitated the relationship between pro-democracy actors and the regime. As Burak Gumus et al. suggest:

In the ‘Information Age’ everything starts with information. So, information sharing is sharing of power. Struggle for searching and spreading of information influences the struggle for power. Information is the base of influence of public opinion. Individual decisions on actions and collective actions depend on public opinion basing on information. Everybody choses between different options on the basis of his information. (2011: n.p)

During the three waves of social unrest in Egypt I have observed the use of Web 2.0 platforms to achieve political goals and I have seen how they have dramatically changed from being ‘tools of connection’ (during the first wave) to ‘tools of oppression’ (during the second wave) to ‘tools of counter power’ (during the third wave). As a response to these observations I have classified the role of Web 2.0 in the Egyptian revolutions into four distinct phases:

outrage and hope, instability and distrust, disinformation and criticism and antagonism and hate. It can be argued that both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries have harnessed the power of Web 2.0 to rally support and to disseminate information/misinformation and propaganda. Alongside Web 2.0 mainstream media and local private satellite channels have also played a critical role in the struggle for power. These information channels – Web2.0 and television – though have actually contributed to an increase in social fragmentation and have trapped these Arab societies in ongoing conflict.

To explore the four distinct phases associated with revolutionary processes and to understand how information influences the decisions of civil society actors to be part of conflict or not (that is, be satisfied with election results or choose to support new military regimes, including Mubarak's), I will study the elements of pre-existing networks. This will involve an examination of social fragmentation, political inclusion and exclusion, media polarisation, and censorship and surveillance. Further, factors which show how information is consumed and produced during a revolution will be examined. Factors such as the digital divide, illiteracy, education, and internet and mobile phone penetrations build on the narratives of social movements.

What follows is an examination of the four phases of Web 2.0 in terms of its role in the Egyptian revolutions.

4.3 Phase one: Outrage and Hope

The first wave of social unrest in Egypt came about as civilians sought freedom, liberty and social justice and this wave of unrest is now widely known as the 'Jan 25 revolution'. The movement was spontaneous, decentralised, self-networked, and grassroots organised and it was motivated by a desire to achieve a western style of democracy. In *Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* Philip Howard argues that 'democratic change in Islamic countries is conditional upon the use of communication technologies' (2010: 31). Several scholars, political commentators, media reporters and activists have emphasised how important information infrastructure was for generating collective action that turned out to play a crucial role in liberating the Arab society. As Ghonim indicated in a CNN interview (2011), 'if you want to liberate society, just give them the internet'. As it turned out the first wave of unrest largely achieved its goals through the use of new social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These served to accelerate political transformation, energise civil society, and catalyse public mobilisation (Khamis and Vahugan 2012: 2). Hart

Cohen adapted the term ‘social energy’ to explain ‘the political mobilisations of large groups of people *encoded* by social media in their contemporary confrontation with authority and dictatorship’ (2012: 2). The internet and social networks, therefore, act as catalysts and as organising mechanisms. Wael Ghonim sees the internet as, ‘the only free media in the Arab world; it is the media no one controls. Thanks Facebook/Twitter/YouTube’ (@ghonim, 2011). According to Eric Selbin, during the events of the first wave of social unrest in Egypt social media networks served as ‘tools of connection’ (cited in Lawson 2012: 15). As George Lawson:

Because ICT networks are meritocratic, informal, horizontal, and transparent, they are, it is argued, necessarily anti-authoritarian. And by sharing information both immediately and without official sanction, ICTs are said to foster a new type of politics, one which was indispensable to the Arab uprisings. (2012: 15)

Mark Lynch (2011) aids an understanding of this phenomenon by arguing that social media contributed to collective action in four ways during the first wave of unrest:

[...] by making it easier for disaffected citizens to act publicly in coordination;(b) by creating information cascades that bolstered protesters’ perceptions of the likelihood of success; (c) by raising the costs of repression by the ruling regimes; and (d) by dramatically increasing publicity through diffusion of information to regional and global publics.

In order to understand the role of social media in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 it is important to outline the chronological events of Web 2.0 applications in Egypt. Egyptian digital activists built on their previous experience of harnessing the power of weblogs and Facebook in political activism by following the steps of their fellow Tunisian activists. They thus created Facebook pages with the aim of establishing a sense of trust among members by sharing credible information, promoting and sharing common grievances and highlighting police and regime brutalities. This resulted in the creation of robust networks of individuals who shared democratic values and who discussed real activism. These networks were established through the use of online public opinion polls.

During the first phase, the democratic environment of the social media sphere established a new form of journalism driven by citizens. The new generation of activists, empowered with mobile phones, created a more vibrant and participatory sphere of information flows. This

was in distinct contrast to the state-controlled media. For example, in Tunisia the self-immolation of Bouazizi was first broadcast on the 'Nawaa' Facebook page. It was never shown on a national TV station. Once these images reached the Tunisian public outrage occurred and Bin-Ali was forced to visit Bouazizi while in hospital.

Social networks have also enhanced street activism because they facilitate the call to political mobilisation. For example, in Egypt, attendance at a political speech prior to the 'Jan 25' revolution was dramatically increased by the preceding activity on Facebook (see Figure 4.1).

Were there warning signals in Egypt?

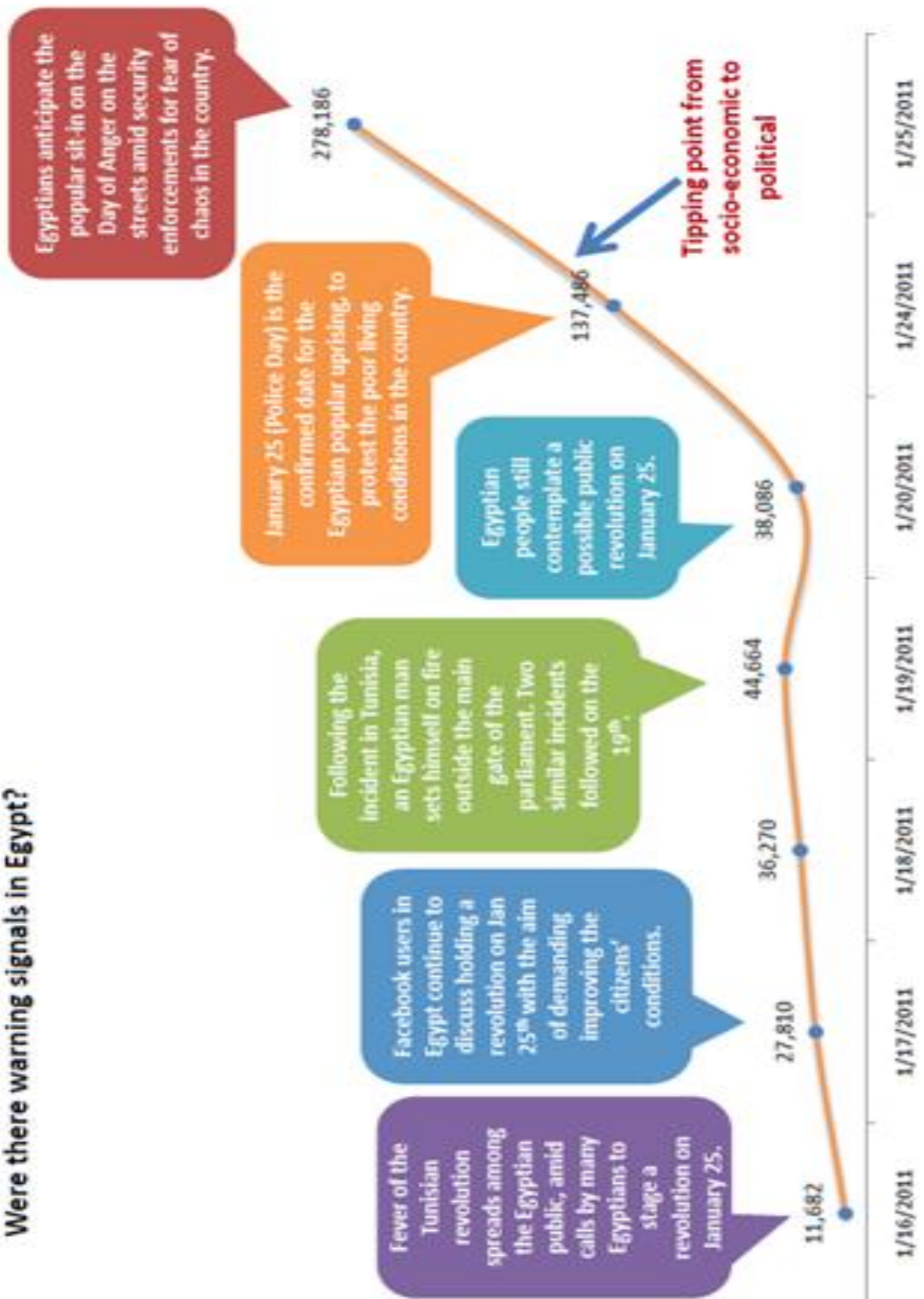


Figure 4.1: Calls for the January 25th revolution become the 4th most discussed subject on social media across the entire Arab world on January 20th. Source: static.com

Research coming out of the American PEW research centre stated that the:

Use of social networking sites for discussion of politics ranked significantly higher in several Arab countries. The numbers using social networking sites overall in the Arab nations generally ranked in the bottom half of the nations surveyed. Still, in Egypt and Tunisia, two nations at the heart of the Arab Spring, more than six-in-ten social networkers said they shared their views about politics online. The same was true for social networkers in Lebanon and Jordan. (2012)

Again in Egypt the call for the ‘Day of Rage’ (28 January 2011) was first announced on ‘We are All Khaled Said’ Facebook page. Similarly, in Syria Facebook pages such as ‘the Syrian Revolution 2011’ and ‘We Are All Hamzeh Al-Khateeb’ played a critical role in the Syrian revolution. On these pages text messages were often posted, some examples being ‘see what is happening in Tunisia’ and ‘tell your friends’ (Baker 2011). Alongside social networks, Google maps were also extensively used to coordinate actions and events between online activists and on-the-ground protesters. For example Google maps were used to avoid clashes with pro-regime supporters and to give directions when police place barricades and road closures were hindering movement. While Google Maps were important for on-the-ground information Twitter was the main tool used for the coordination of protests. For example, some Tahrir square activists equipped with smart phones kept the world informed of what was happening by feeding live to #Jan 25 and #Egypt. Howard and Hussein maintain that ‘Twitter seems to have been a key tool in the region for raising expectations of success and coordination strategies’ (2013: 814). Twitter played a role on-the- ground with the 140 Twitter characters proving crucial for sending messages to activists on the ground who then guided protesters. Twitter was also used to raise international awareness and to communicate the events with human right organisations who then fed the news to networks hungry for media content on the uprisings. As Denis Campbell notes:

In 18 days, Twitter went from a tool used primarily by and for self-indulgent techies, to a powerful counter-block to a repressive regime’s attempts to shut down all opposition. Nobody had ever seen Tweets used this way and it represented a sea change in the way news is gathered and history recorded. (2011: 367)

The video portal site YouTube also played a role. It worked as an ‘instant witness’ to events and consequently raised international awareness by documenting the regime’s brutality. Web 2.0 was the basis for these entire different social forms and it thus acted as a catalyst for the first wave of social unrest in Egypt which went on to shift the balance of power in favour of the civil society actors and their quest for democracy. As Ulises Mejias, in his book *Off the Network*, notes:

The mass adoption of corporate-owned digital networks has somehow been heralded as the end of cultural monopolies. Power has shifted, we are told, and no longer is an elite minority in control of the production and dissemination of messages. That capacity has now been distributed among a new army of content producers who digitize, analyse, aggregate, and share content without a need for permissions or licenses, and who face no steep barriers of entry.

(2013: 30-31)

To this end Web 2.0 platforms were hailed as ‘technologies of liberation’ and as ‘tools of empowerment’ because civil society actors achieved what they aimed for in terms of political change in ousting Bin-Ali and Mubarak. The popularity of Web 2.0 applications during the first wave of democratic movements led political commentators and journalists to declare the Egyptian revolution a ‘Facebook revolution’ and the Tunisian revolution a ‘Twitter revolution’.

The exhilaration of this period, though, changed during the second wave of social unrest in Egypt and concomitantly Web 2.0 technologies entered a different phase in terms of their role in the social struggle.

4.4 Phase Two: Instability and Distrust

Soon after Mubarak was ousted by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), due to pressure from activism, the new military rulers then in power were pressured under heavy criticism from outraged publics to surrender power and to hand leadership over to a democratically elected president. Unlike the ‘Jan 25’ revolution when the military were seen as being the protector of the nation, during the second wave of unrest the SCAF used excessive force in dealing with protesters. During this brief transition period, and for the first time, the military had to establish counter measures to deal with a deluge of online criticism. As a consequence, in December 2011, SCAF entered a new era of social media presence and

it established a Facebook page and a Twitter account to relay announcements and to gauge public opinion. As Adel Iskander (2012), from George Washington University observed, ‘SCAF has even released edited videos of the clashes taken from among the ranks of civilians that they claim were protesters’. So the military has itself recruited ‘amateur military journalist brigades and social media teams to counter online activists’.

Egyptian digital activists in response have created several Facebook pages, the most popular being ‘Fangary, You Cannot Threaten Us’ (Fangary is the military spokesperson) and ‘Askar Kazeboon’ (military are liars). For nearly 18 months of SCAF’s rule, their relationship with the revolutionaries media can be characterised as a period of media instability and distrust. Both SCAF and the revolutionaries have thrown anecdotes of breaking the law based on citizen journalism reporting. As Iskandar (2012) remarked,

In many instances, plainclothes military recruits are sent into protester ranks to shoot footage that can then be used to incriminate them. This video was disseminated widely online and sent to the television networks for broadcast to ‘counter’ propaganda against the military. The state media presented it as fact, while most private media subjected it to close examination and scrutiny.

This transition period, though, perceived equal power relation dynamics between the rulers and the ruled as both the revolutionaries and SCAF have adapted the power of Web 2.0 when addressing civil society groups. The instability and distrust of social media landscape soon transformed into new phase after Muslim Brotherhood declared ultimate triumph in the presidential elections in June 2012.

4.5 Phase three: Disinformation and Criticism

During the rule of the Islamic Brotherhood political party in 2012-2013, and the corresponding expansion of democracy, Egypt’s media landscape grew exponentially. According to a UNESCO report (2012):

an estimated 567 newspapers had been registered, up from 142 in the pre-revolution period. The same report charted ‘important’ growth in television, with 15 new channels that included CBC, a leading private station; the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Misr25; and Al-Masry, which is associated with the liberal Al-Wafd.

Since during this rule liberal parties maintained a heavy presence in the media landscape they acted as a counter-power, but this led to a proliferation in the networks of disinformation, defamation and criticism. To deflect the widespread criticism the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) political party established a number of online portals such as Ikhwan-online and Ikhwan-web, along with some Facebook pages – namely Mukafahat El-elmanyah (anti-secularism) and Hisbul El-horryah wa Al-adalah (Freedom and Justice political party) – as well as a daily newspaper. In response to the large scale of the organised and coordinated attacks from liberal media outlets, Ikhwan’s Facebook pages and TV channels were aggressive in defending the president and in attacking his critics who they portrayed as self-interested and counter-revolutionary. The Ikhwan’s media outlets also used highly charged religious rhetoric to discredit other journalists, going so far as to suggest direct attacks against some journalists. Despite all these measures, though, Shareef Mansour (2013), a researcher at Committee to Protect Journalism (CPJ), argues that even with the strong presence of Ikhwan in Egypt’s media landscape, ‘they are unable to deflect or silence widespread criticism’ and activism. For example, liberal parties established the ‘National Salvation Front’ and Tamarod (rebellion) movements both of which have organised weekly calls for political mobilisation to condemn Ikhwan’s rule. As Iskandar (2013) observed:

With this growing space for political expression—and despite its polarisation between pro-Brotherhood, opposition, and unaffiliated activist—the capacity to organise online has been heightened significantly. Hundreds of protests and strikes occur across the country every week with most of these utilizing social media as a platform for engagement, mobilisation, and documentation. Those activities that court or attract public figures tend to see their capacity magnify and their participation increase.

The conflict has been further heightened by the activities of pro-Morsi supporters, who, according to a report by the CPJ (2013), prevented media personnel and hosts from entering the Egyptian media production city. In March 2013 pro-Morsi supporters surrounded five private satellite channels – Al-Hayat, ONTV, Al-Nahar, Al-Qahira wal Nas, and CBC – and accused the outlets of inciting violence. With Egypt divided into two camps, liberals and Islamists, Shahira Amin (2013) argues that, ‘the media is also split, aligning itself with one side or the other’. Egyptian people mainly depend on TV and satellite channels as their first source of information but this has created a polarised media environment. As Daniel Drezner argues, ‘even if people may have previously chosen one action, seemingly little information

can induce the same people to choose the exact opposite action in response to a slight increase in information' (2010: 40). As a result of this polarised environment Iskandar (2013) argued that, 'journalistic professionalism went out of the window as each camp drummed up support for its side and demonized the other'. For example, as calls have grown on the streets for a return to military rule, the private media has reverted back to glorifying the military, portraying the armed forces as the 'guardians of the revolution' (Amin 2013). As Alomrani and Morrow contend (2013), social media networks during the Ikhwan's rule have come to show a darker side despite the quest for political freedom: 'these networks are now playing a less positive role, often serving as a platform for incitement, rumour-mongering and downright disinformation'. Overall, as Ronfeldt and Varda suggest, 'the existence of democracy does not assure that the new technology will strengthen democratic tendencies and be used as a force for good rather than evil. The new technology may be a double-edged sword even in a democracy' (2008: 30).

Despite this less than positive development, counter revolutionary powers have, alongside their offline campaigns, employed online platforms and satellite channels to successfully mobilise millions of people at almost every public square in the country calling for an end to the Ikhwan rule. This resulted in a second military coup, led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, on July 3rd 2013. As Iskandar contends, 'the sharp divisions in the press are reflected in competing narratives over the military-backed transition and its impact on the press' (2013: 13).

4.6 Phase four: Antagonism and Hate

As just discussed a media war exists between the liberals and Islamists, but this war is unbalanced because the liberals control over 70% of the Egyptian media outlets and they have shifted the balance of power to serve their interests. In Figure 4.2 shows Rassd new network and Tahrir TV channel were the only platforms recognised as being a pro-Morsi media portals.

| # | Profile | Following | Followers | Rating |
|----|---|-----------|-----------|--------|
| 1. |  المصري اليوم (@AlMasryAlYoum) | 10 | 1 456 487 | 5 |
| 2. |  Shorouk News (@Shorouk_News) | 3 | 1 251 350 | 6 |
| 3. |  ONtv (@ONtveg) | 28 | 1 177 882 | 10 |
| 4. |  CBC Egypt (@CBC_EGY) | 7 | 1 144 732 | 10 |
| 5. |  Tahrir News (@Tahrir_News) | 0 | 1 131 886 | 0 |
| 6. |  شبكة رصد (@Rassd_News) | 0 | 1 127 609 | 5 |
| 7. |  اليوم السابع (@youm7) | 5 | 1 116 917 | 10 |
| 8. |  الدستور الأصلي (@DostorNews) | 0 | 871 238 | 0 |
| 9. |  Tahrir Channel (@TahrirTv) | 0 | 622 807 | 10 |

Figure 4.2: This figure shows that liberal media channels are the most followed on the social media platform of Twitter. Source: Social bakers 2013

The liberal’s media portals have been used successfully to call for mass political mobilisations for example to pre-announce ‘June 30’ as a day of protest, a protest which led to the toppling of the democratically elected president Mohammed Morsi. Local and international media outlets claimed that this was the biggest mass mobilisation of people in human history and reported that over 20 million people joined the protests (e.g. BBC 2013, al-Arabiya 2013, *Huffington Post* 2013). On the 3rd of July 2013, in response to the public outrage, the military, led by General el-Sisi, ousted Morsi and imprisoned him. The media played a key role in unseating Morsi. As Iskandar (2013) notes:

what was once the Brotherhood and military's greatest asset, secrecy, has now become a liability in Egypt's changing media landscape. For decades, the Brotherhood has been vilified by the press, which led the organization into near-absolute media insularity. Just like the military establishment, the Brotherhood wore camouflage over the past 60 years. The armed forces did so to conceal their privilege role in power and the Brotherhood to obfuscate their adversarial position to power. In the end, both have been burnt by the media spotlight, a predicament not so unfavourable for a revolutionary Egypt and a promising sign of the awakening of Egypt's fourth estate.

In the aftermath of Morsi’s overthrow the military conducted massive crackdown operations targeting Ikhwan and their media outlets. As Shareef Mansour, from (CPJ) observed:

Over the following weeks, several steps were taken to extend censorship of pro-Morsi media. Al-Ahram, the government printing house, refused to print the Muslim Brotherhood's *Freedom and Justice* daily, and Egypt's Nilesat satellite operator jammed three pan-Arab satellite television stations, the Hamas-affiliated stations Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa, and the Jordanian Al-Yarmouk, when they tried to broadcast pro-Morsi demonstrations. (2013: 12)

Morsi's overthrow, however, has created a polarised media landscape that has divided Egyptian society. The society has been divided into two 'camps' and these two camps have come to dominate much of the Egyptian media landscape fuelling antagonism and hatred between the two groups. This has led to physical confrontations where blood has been spilled with many thousands of Morsi's supporters being killed by the military and their supporters. Further, anti-Ikhwan media networks have catalysed publics to fight pro-Morsi demonstrators and have portrayed Ikhwan and their supporters as terrorists. This is akin to the US 'war on terror'. As Iskandar (2013) notes:

Their demonization of Islamists, dismissal of the pro-Morsi rallies, and growing dehumanization of other Egyptians is becoming characteristic. Many such media came out squarely on the side of the military when fifty pro-Morsi protesters were killed in front of the Presidential Guards by the armed forces. Failing to acknowledge wrongdoing on the part of the military, some have gone as far as drumming up xenophobia against non-Egyptians, Palestinians, and Syrians for their alleged support of Morsi.

In return pro-Morsi supporters have also harnessed the power of social media networks to catalyse publics to condemn the military coup, to highlight military brutality and to call for democratisation. As a result of this retaliation a third wave of social unrest erupted. The conflict which erupted resulted in the introduction of pro-el-Sisi supporters who attacked and criticised the conflict. Generally information warfare was waged alongside activities of intimidation, physical harassment, media crackdowns and the arrest of Ikhwan members and their supporters. Amnesty international (2013) called the media crackdowns a, 'blow to freedom of expression'. At the time of writing this thesis (February 2014), the events of the third wave of social unrest are yet to come to an end and antagonism and hate continue to dominate the Egyptian media landscape. Although Facebook and Aljazeera were the only

tools of the new revolutionaries the Ikhwan has been unable to achieve their political change. In regards to this, Clint Watts (2013) argues:

for those that lauded the wonders of social media activism, the coup showed the weaknesses of Facebook revolutions for achieving lasting political change. Social media may have prompted Egyptians to storm the streets in January 2011, but it did not result in Western style democracy. Instead of the more Western and secular elements in Egypt leading change, the Muslim Brotherhood's democratically elected leaders triumphed at the ballot boxes and further divided the country more than they unified it. Two years later, the failure of Egypt's 'Facebook Revolution' with a return to authoritarian military rule may in fact set democracy in the Middle East back more than it ever progressed it. This brings us to Malcolm Gladwell.

Gladwell is a cyber-utopian critic who downplayed the potential of Facebook and Twitter to achieve political change. In his two controversial articles in *The New Yorker*, 'Does Egypt Need Twitter' (2011) and 'Small Change' (2010), Gladwell argued, 'people protested and brought down governments before Facebook was invented'. In East Germany and during the French revolutions revolutionaries achieved their political goals without internet access or the use of mobile phones. He calls social media activism 'high risk' because he believes 'social activism requires deep roots and strong ties'. Despite Gladwell's arguments the military coup did occur and Facebook and Twitter did play a role. It is still a legitimate question, therefore, to consider whether the revolutions would have occurred without them. In the next section I will highlight the importance of the Web 2.0 platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and consider how they contributed to the events of the social uprisings in Egypt between 2011 and 2013.

4.7 Facebook Pages

Facebook.com is the largest social media platform on the Web. In October 2012 Facebook celebrated its one billionth member. It has been said that if Facebook were a country it would be the third largest in the world. Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, a 22 year old Harvard student. The online portal spread virally in 2006 after Facebook administration decided that everyone could join – prior to this it had been exclusively for Harvard and college students. The pervasiveness of Facebook among young Arabs has opened new communication channels of social interaction and political activism. During the

events of the Arab Spring uprisings Arab youth stunned the world by organising themselves into Facebook political groups such as ‘April 6 youth movement’ and ‘we are all Khaled Said’ in Egypt, and ‘Nawaa’, ‘Ma Tunisie’ in Tunisia. The youth of Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya have also harnessed the new medium after demonstrators rallied in the streets and squares of these countries after being inspired by Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. In Syria Facebook groups such as ‘We are all Hamza Al-khateeb’ and ‘The Syrian revolution 2011’ were not only used to call for political mobilisation but were also used to disseminate information and to post revolution updates.

The role of Facebook in the political activism of these countries has attracted the attention of scholars, academics and political commentators who have sought to shed light on the characteristics of the new medium of communication and to understand how it has changed communication and media landscapes. In regards to the Arab Spring uprisings, Facebook played a central and pivotal role in shifting the power dynamics between the Arab authoritarian regimes and the civilian activists. Despite this shift, my digital ethnographic research in Egypt showed that narratives about Facebook have ceased being only about how it aids liberation to how it can also be used for oppressing people, that is, it has shifted from being a liberator to an oppressor. In other words, networks of antagonism and hate have emerged and replaced the networks of outrage and hope as the Facebook landscape has come to engage the Egyptian community in the political struggle between seculars and Islamists.

For the remainder of this section I will explore the importance of Facebook in political activism and repression, while in chapter four I will more closely analyse Facebook data in order to gain an understanding of what role Facebook plays in polarising the media.

Some broad statistics on Facebook indicated that, according to the Dubai School of Government (DSG) (2011), the total number of Facebook users in the Arab world stands at 27,711,503 (as of April 5, 2011), up from 21,377,282 (January 5, 2011), having almost doubled since the same time the year prior (14,791,972 in April 2010). This number doubled again to reach nearly 50 million Arab users by August 2012. The Arab users are predominantly Arab youth between the ages of 15 and 29, a sector of the society which make up nearly 70% of the population. With this volume of users Facebook has come to be the preferred social media platform in the Arab world (see Figure 4.3).

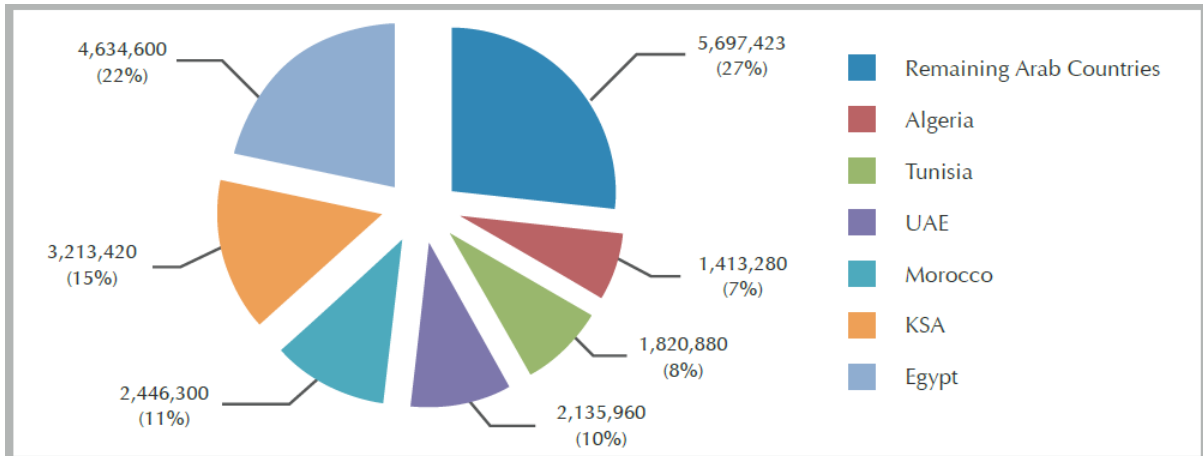
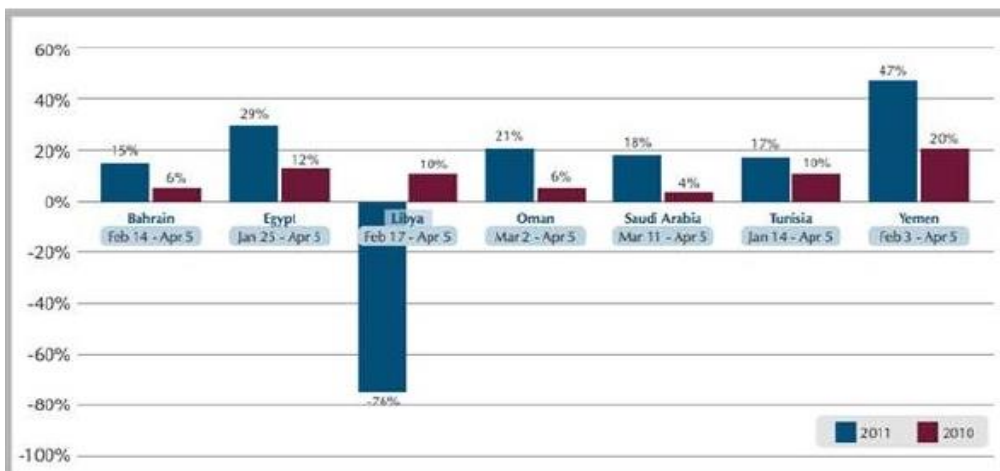


Figure 4.3: Facebook penetration in the Arab world in January 2011. Source: Dubai School of Government.

According to the *e-Marketing Egypt Online Competitiveness Intelligence report (2013)* Egypt's Facebook community witness grew 41% between 2011 and 2012 and by 21 July 2012 the number of users was 11.3 million. This means that the current number of Facebook users in the Arab world is approximately 17 million people (see Figure 4.4).



(Figure 4.4) The growth rate of Facebook users during 2011 uprisings, as compared to the same time period in 2010. Source: Arab social media report 2011.

The latest statistics show that an enormous number of Arab youth connected and harnessed the power of the new social network such that Facebook became a key player in the events of the Arab Spring uprisings. Facebook aided the revolutionaries during the waves of social unrest in Egypt in four main ways and these are explored below.

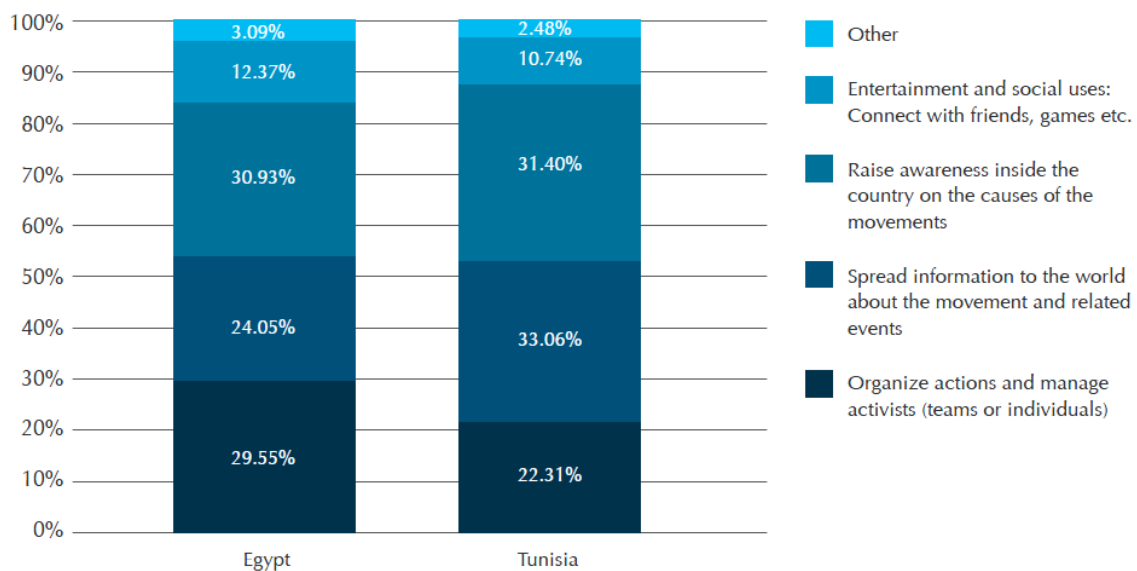
a) Facebook acted as a medium of communication: Facebook offered a fast reliable way of communicating that minimises the role of email, bulletin boards and chatting channels such as Yahoo and Hotmail (MSN). Facebook offered video and photo services in addition to ‘share’, ‘comment’ and ‘like’ characteristics which allow users to contribute content. The convergence of Facebook with other social platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Skype makes it a unique communication environment. Also, it allowed individuals with political, social and economic ambitions to create networks of people with an unlimited number of members, where quite literally millions of participants can be edified with a mere click of a mouse.

b) Facebook allowed for ‘virtual togetherness’ and the development of online communities. Virtual togetherness is a concept that was coined by Maria Bakardjieva in 2003. Bakardjieva believed that online there are different ways in which people engage with others. She said, ‘I recognise new vehicles that allow users to traverse the social world and penetrate previously unattainable regions of anonymity as well as to expand their social reach’ (2003: 292). Facebook has played a central role in creating networks of people who share common grievances whether they were political, religious or social. Online participants have the autonomy to participate in any networks they wish and this has created a space for civic engagement and self-expression free from social restrictions. In Lebanon, for example, lesbian and gay communities – considered taboo in the Arab world – have, for the first time, created Facebook groups. This ‘virtual togetherness’ has helped civilian activists to overcome fear. Fear of retaliation by Arab regimes has been the main factor that previously hindered calls for democracy and public liberty. This has left the Arab population in a state of political stagnation for many decades. Manuel Castells, in his recent book *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012), highlighted the connection between the emergence of social media networks and the overcoming of fear. He showed that togetherness is the key to success for the movements because it is through togetherness that people overcome fear. In his own words, ‘togetherness is the starting point and the source of empowerment’ (2012: 225). Thus Facebook political groups such as ‘Nawaa’ and ‘We Are all Khalid Said’ were the wheels that drove the Arab street uprisings. During the Egyptian uprisings of January 2011 some revolutionaries held banners that said, ‘thanks Facebook for breaking the fear barrier’ (see Figure 4.5). The power of togetherness was therefore at the root of the Arab Spring revolutions.



Figure 4.5: an Egyptian man holds up a sign praising Facebook ‘we have overcome centuries of fear’. Source; blogspot.com

c) Social media in general and Facebook in particular, challenged state-controlled media by offering an open source of information. Through this such media gained the public’s trust. The emergence of what is called ‘grassroots media’ or ‘citizen journalism’ has highlighted the corruption and brutality of authoritarian regimes, and catalysed publics for political action and the organisation of protests that have raised awareness (see Figure 4.6).



(Figure 4.6): Shows the main usage of Facebook during social movements early 2011.

Source (DSG 2011)

On the other hand, Facebook has also come to be seen as a double edged sword. During the Egyptian uprisings the authoritarian regime could learn of the date, time and location of protests because most of them were pre-announced on Facebook pages. Further, the police could identify participants and trouble makers through images posted on Facebook during these events. This made it easy for the police to persecute and imprison activists. Despite these limitations Facebook is still an important tool for activists and this is particularly so because it has remained the only medium of communication available to civilian activists after media crackdowns implemented during the third wave of social uprisings.

d) Facebook was important for establishing and strengthening social ties. Through its social networks Facebook led to the creation of new forms of social relationship. In social media networks there are two types of social relationships: ‘strong ties’ and ‘weak ties’. Strong tie relationships are where people know each other socially regardless of the geographical distance. Weak tie relations tend to be friend of friend type relationships. This latter type of relationship has empowered social networks because people have been encouraged to participate in online debates and then progress to participating offline and this was the case in both the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions.

In order to better understand the ebb and flow tendencies of the sphere of social media and its role in shifting the dynamics of power shift, in order to understand whether it is used as a tool of liberation or one of repression, it is necessary to draw on empirical studies rather than just engage in a theoretical exercise of questioning and critique. The next section of this chapter, therefore, is an outline of my primary analysis of Facebook data which was extracted from the pages of the clashing networks after then ‘25 Jan’ protests. My aim in this section is to show how Facebook has been used to both liberate and oppress Egyptian society. Using this information I seek to consider and predict how social media will be used in future social movements and political change.

4.8 Facebook Data

This section is an analysis of the Facebook pages of the pro-Ikhwan revolutionaries and the pro-military counter-revolutionaries who were directly involved in the conflict between the liberal parties and Islamists to determine whether the use of Facebook networks is significant for reaching political ends. As mentioned in chapter 3 both parties used Facebook to advance their cause, a situation beneficial for their activities but one which widened the social fragmentation of Egyptian society at large. Despite this divide Facebook was particularly

important after Morsi was ousted in July 2013 because it became the only medium of communication available to the Islamists when they set out to battle the liberals and army-ruled state powers in the aftermath of Morsi's removal.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, Facebook data was collected using a digital ethnography approach which consisted of the self-observation of information flows on the Facebook pages of the revolutionaries and the counter-revolutionaries. To understand how Facebook played a role in galvanising publics for political mobilisation and how it shifted the dynamics of power between the military rulers and civil society actors I divided my self-observations into four distinct sub-sets. First is an examination of the Facebook networks of the pro-military and pro Ikhwan groups. Second is an analysis of media networks that have a heavy presence on social media and which have played a central role in flaming the crisis. Third, is an examination of the Facebook trends that have been most frequently used by both parties. Lastly is a study of the interactions between the social media platform of Facebook and the media channels of the revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, interactions that ultimately led to the ignition of the second and the third waves of political unrest in Egypt.

4.9 Facebook Networks of the Pro-military and Pro-Ikhwan Groups

The Egyptian military and their supporters have a number of Facebook pages which they used to oppose Ikhwan and the four largest of these pages are displayed in Figure 4.7.

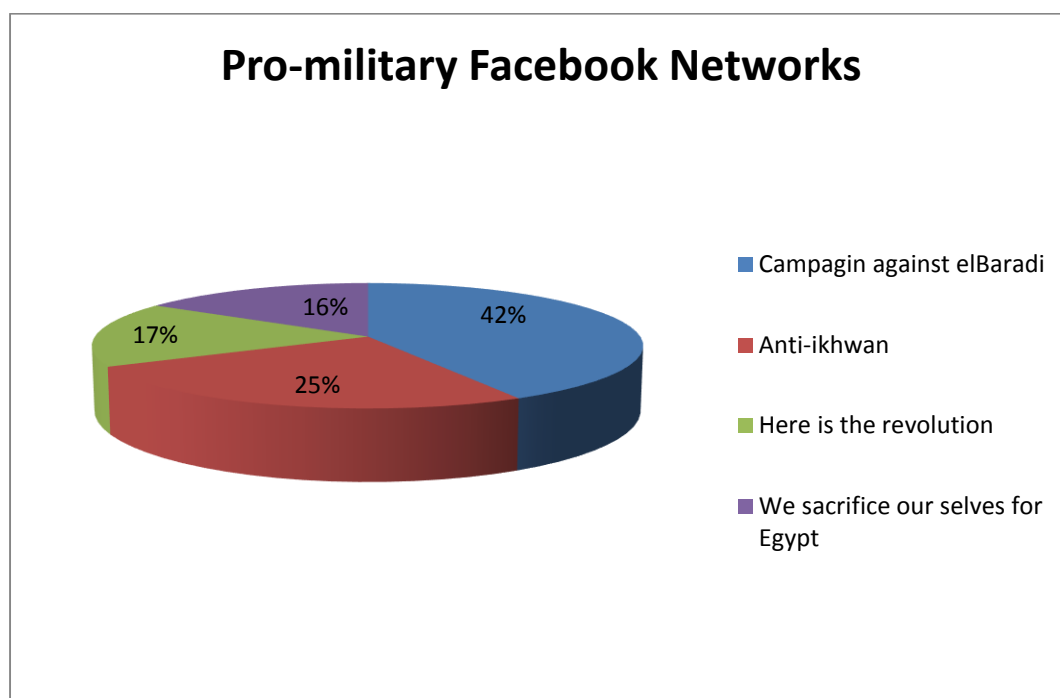


Figure 4.7: Present pro-military Facebook pages

The criteria of selection were based on the number of ‘likes’ per page which is a good indicator of membership numbers. This criteria is a good predictor of the size of a network and thus of the network’s effectiveness in acting as a tool for political mobilisation, in this case in spreading hatred of Ikhwan which may or may not lead to political change. The four networks graphically represented in Figure 4.1 were the most anticipated networks of the pro-military regime because they were established after June 2012 when the Ikhwan party was democratically elected and after July 2013 after the fall of this same party.

As seen in Figure 4.7 the largest pro-military regime Facebook network is ‘The million campaign against ElBaradei, spread it as you hate him, what you waiting for’. Statistics for this page are displayed in Figure 4.8.

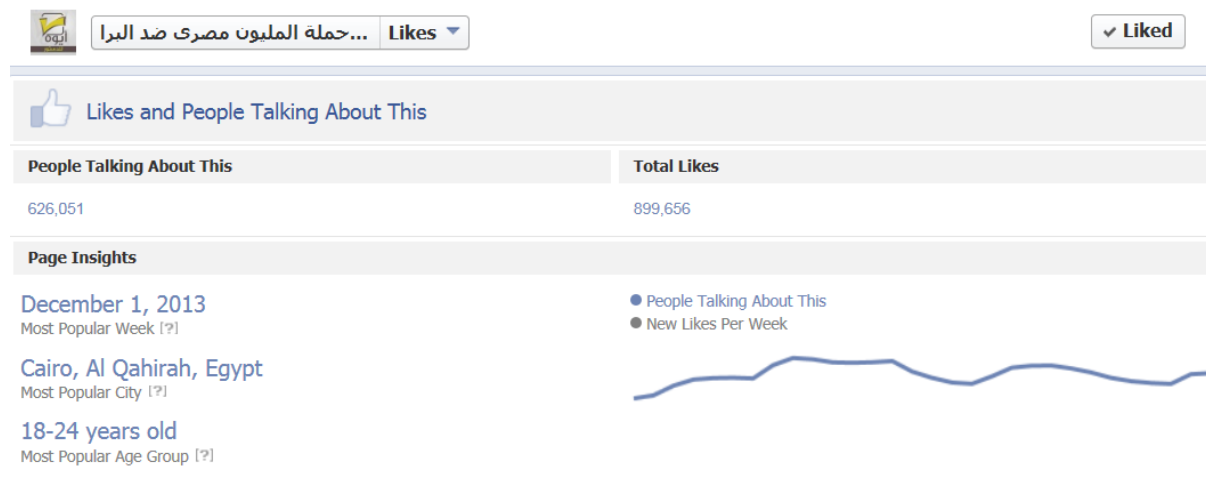


Figure 4.8: The insights picture of the million campaign against ElBaradei

The ‘million campaign against ElBaradei’ Facebook network was launched in 2013 after the military appointed Mohammed ElBaradei the interim Prime minister after the military coup on 3rd July 2013. ElBaradei resigned from this position the day before the military decided to crush a peaceful sit-in being held at Rabea Adawyah square on 14 August 2013. Comprising 42% of the share of pro-military Facebook members this page is the largest pro-military Facebook page. As of 24 January 2014 it had almost 899,000 members and in comparison to other pro-military networks it has become the most active in terms of number of likes and the number of comments. Almost 626,000 people are talking about the site (see Figure 4.8). In the ‘About Us’ section of the site the purpose of the page is stated clearly: ‘we are against el-Baradi, against Ikhwan[,] against April 6 movement and against all traitors of our army and

country'. In this way the page promotes hate and antagonism against Ikhwan. An example is shown in Figure 4.9. For example see post below



Figure 4.9 shows the claim that ‘the people want to hang Ikhwan’. Such hate-filled speech, misinformation and propaganda dominates this page. An examination of the page’s contents and comments quickly reveals the homogenous response of military members aiming to ‘root out’ Ikhwan member and to provoke public outrage against them.

The second largest pro-military regime Facebook network is ‘Anti-Ikhwan’. Statistics for this site are shown in figure 4.10.



Figure 4.10: Anti Ikhwan Facebook page insights

Anti Ikhwan was launched in 2013 when the third wave of social unrest erupted after the second military coup ousted the elected president Morsi. This network has almost 530,000 members and most of its information is based on reflections of mainstream media propaganda. The site is therefore dominated by defamatory comments directed at Ikhwan and

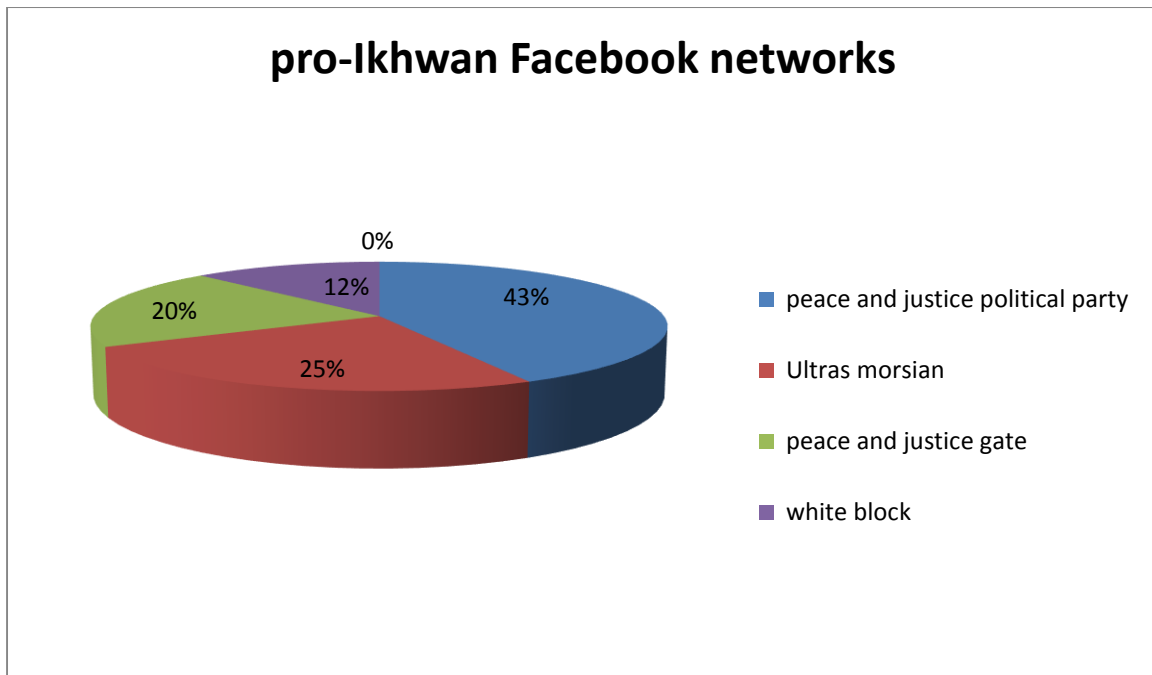
its supporters; any wrong doing, even that not done by Ikhwan, is claimed to have been done by Ikhwan in an attempt to sabotage them. The site is also the most hateful because there are regular calls to kill every Ikhwan in the country. For example, a caricature posted on 11 January 2014 displays shaking hands – representing the Egyptian people and the Egyptian military – aiming a gun at the flag of Ikhwan. This cartoon is displayed in Figure 4.11



Other pro-military Facebook networks are 'Here is the revolution' ('Huna elthawrah'), 'we sacrifice ourselves for Egypt' ('Kullena feda misr') and 'Brotherhood are liars' ('Ikhwan kazeboon'). These sites have almost 300,000 members each and like the previously mentioned sites spread hatred towards Ikhwan and Aljazeera – the latter widely being referred to as 'alkhnzeera' ('the hog').

In opposition pro-Ikhwan social networks have emerged and initiated online attacks against the new military regime, and particularly after the new regime shut down all Islamic satellite channels which acted on behalf of Ikhwan. Specifically in regards to Facebook at least 12 large pages have emerged which have sought to counter the barriers that have been set up to block information dissemination. These pages have also taken up an oppositional stance against the pro-military Facebook pages.

In this analysis a spotlight has been placed on the most popular networks: 'Peace and Justice political party' ('Hizbul horriah wal adalah'), 'Peace and Justice Gate' ('Bawabet horriay wel adalah'), 'Ultras Morsian' and 'the Islamic White block, see Figure 4.12.



In Figure 4.12 it is clear that the ‘Peace and Justice political party’ is the largest social network which is acting on behalf of Ikhwan. Statistics for this page are outlined in Figure 4.13.

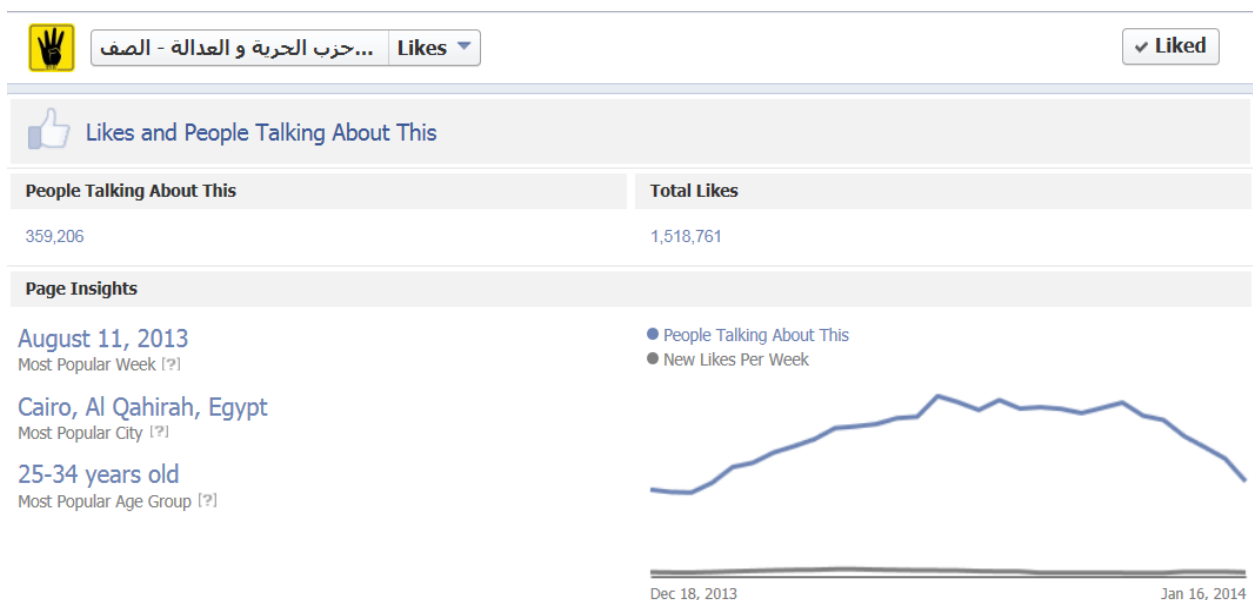


Figure 4.13: Shows the insights of peace and justice Facebook networks

The Peace and Justice Facebook page currently has over 1.5 million likers, and most of them are members of the Ikhwan political party and are distributed in many different geographical

locations. This social network has been the strongest and most forthright in defending Ikhwan and for calling people to respect the legitimacy of the 2012 democratic elections by returning Morsi, the ousted elected president, to his leadership position. Most of the media posted on the page has been in regards to peaceful protests with accompanying comments such as, ‘our peaceful protests are stronger than your weapons’. While these call to action have been of a peaceful nature some of the other pro-Ikhwan sites have urged people to oppose the Coptic Church. For instance, the Facebook page of the Helwan branch of the Freedom and Justice Party has outrageously, justifies the burning of churches (Figure 4.14).



Figure 4.14: Facebook page of the Helwan branch of the Freedom and Justice Party

The post in Figure 4.14 says:

The Pope of the Church is involved in the removal of the first elected Islamist president. The Pope of the Church alleges [that] Islamic Sharia is backwards, stubborn, and reactionary. The Pope of the Church sponsors Black Bloc groups to create chaos, pursue banditry, and siege and storm mosques. The Church mobilises the Copts in June 30 demonstrations to topple the Islamist president. The Pope of the Church objects to the articles of Islamic identity and withdraws from the Constituent Assembly. The Pope of the Church was the first to respond to el-Sisi’s call to authorise the killing of Muslims and the outcome of the authorisation was more than 500 dead today. The Pope of the Church sends a memo to the current commission to cancel the articles of Sharia. After all this people ask why they burn the churches.

The second largest pro-Ikhwan Facebook network is ‘Ultras Morsian’ and this site was launched in 2012 to replace the ‘Mukafahat Elmanyah’ (anti secular) Facebook page that was the focus of attacks by seculars who eventually succeeded in shutting down the site. Statistics for this Facebook page are displayed in Figure 4.15.

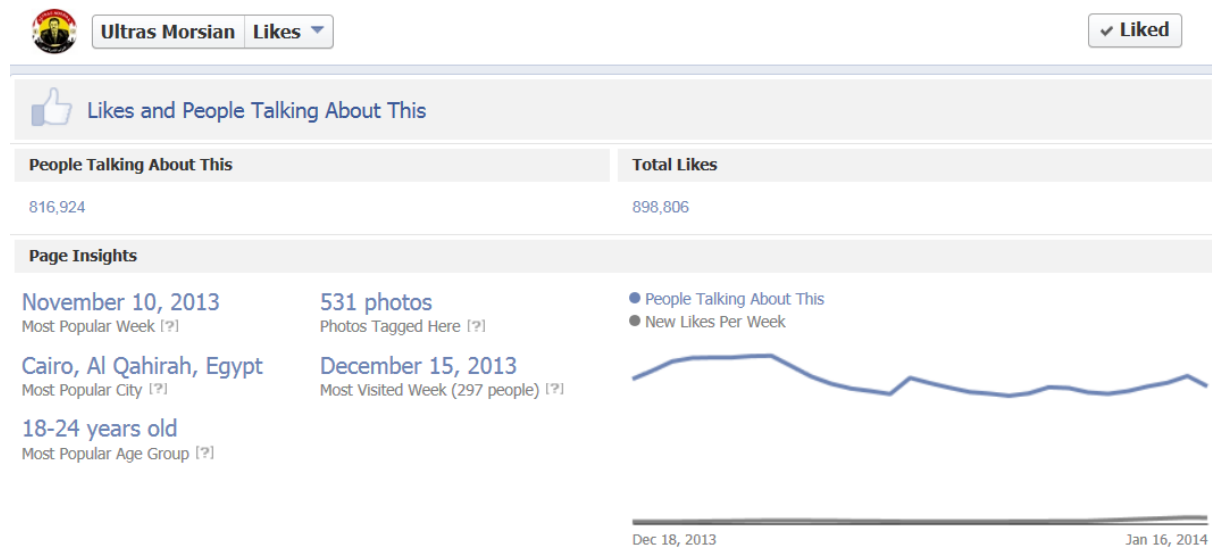


Figure 4.15: The insights of Ultras Morsian Facebook page as of 24 January 2014

The ‘Ultras Morsian’ Facebook network has almost 900,000 likers. As a site it is very different from the ‘Peace and Justice’ social network because it has been specifically used to catalyse publics to engage in daily mobilisation to bring down the military rulers under the motto ‘yaskut hokm el-askar’ (‘no for military rule’) and ‘elthowrah mostamerah’ (‘we will continue the revolution’). The Facebook page has therefore helped pro-Ikhwan people to triumph against the military on a number of occasions. For example people have used the page to organise continuous protests which extend all day and night and which have forced the military to declare a countrywide curfew from 7pm until 12pm.

Another large Facebook network is called ‘Bawabet horriay wel adalah’ (‘peace and justice gate’) and comprises 700,000 likers. This site is a copycat profile of the ‘Peace and Justice’ Facebook page because it originated by first being posted on the original Facebook page but with its only difference being that it includes more analysis, photos and videos which highlight police brutality.

The last Facebook page in this analysis is the White Block page which has approximately 450,000 likers and was launched in 2012. The White block page emerged to defend the interests of Ikhwan when violence was shown against Ikhwan members by people of an anti-

Islamic group called the Black block. The latter group used violence against Ikhwan, physically harming people and destroying and looting their properties. In one instance the group used Molotov Cocktails to burn down the presidential and the Ikhwan headquarters. The group also harnessed Facebook to initiate other anti- Ikhwan movements. In response the White block Facebook network aimed to expose the acts of the Black block group and to raise awareness among peaceful protesters urging them to avoid clashes with the violent groups. Alongside the 'White block' Facebook page a number of other pages rallied people to support Ikhwan. Some examples are: 'we are all Ala sadik', 'Broadcasters are liars', 'Wikileaks documents' and 'Morsi is the President' and these sites were used to highlight the brutality of the military rulers and to call people to preserve the outcomes of 'Jan 25' revolution.

4.10 Facebook Media Networks Involved with Social Media and Key Players in the Conflict

In Egypt Facebook has become a medium where state-controlled media and the media of the revolutionaries' have strengthened their appearance in order to reach Facebook users who have come to total approximately 17million in Egypt alone (e-marketing Egypt 2014). In this analysis I have chosen three of the largest networks associated with the revolutionaries and three of the largest associated with the counter revolutionaries in order to study what impact they have had on the dynamics of power and on the success of these groups to achieve political ends.

In regards to the pro-military the three largest media networks which appear on Facebook are: 'Misr al-yaoum' ('Egypt today') 'Alahram' ('the pyramids') and 'Bawabet elwafd' ('the delegation electronic gate') (see Figure 4.16).

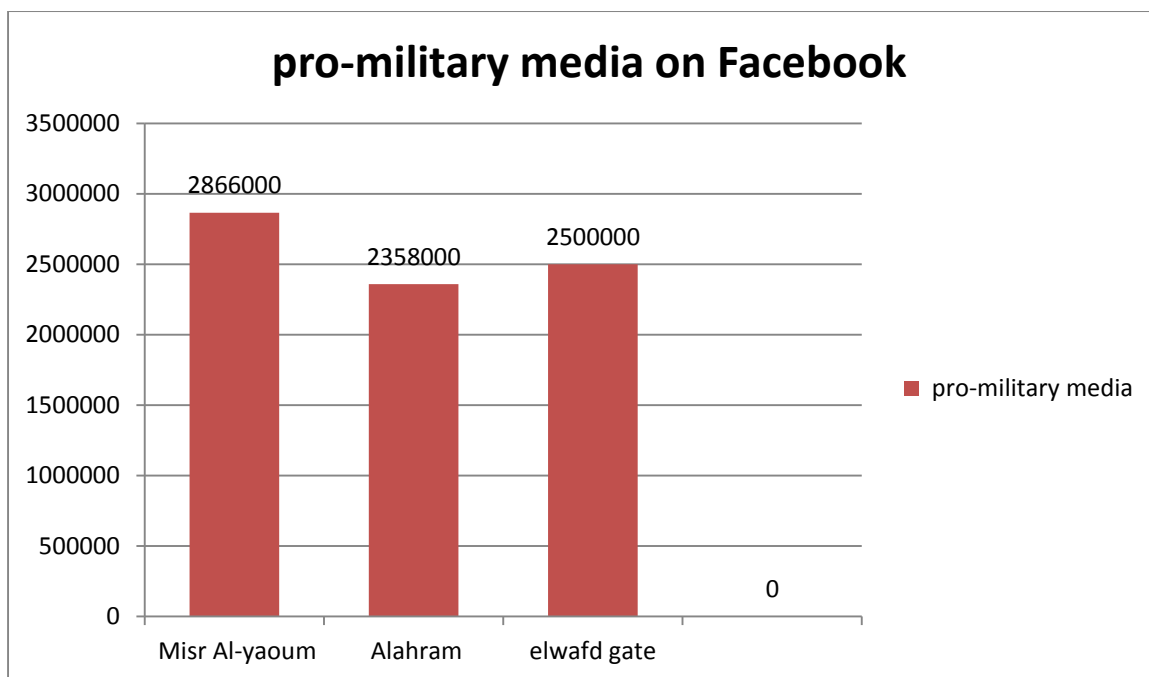


Figure 4.16: The number of members in three of the largest pro-military Facebook media networks (January 2014)

The military regime has strengthened their online presence in order to maintain their control over information dissemination, and over propaganda and defamation. ‘Misr Al-yaoum’ and ‘Alharam’ are the most famous and widespread print newspapers in Egypt and are thus often the first source of information for a large proportion of the Egyptian population. As more Egyptian youth have made the shift to digital media for their source of information the newspapers have adapted by developing a strong online presence. They have produced online newsletters which have come to have over 5 million followers on Facebook. Using these newsletters they have diffused intelligence-filtered information to misguided members of the public. They have claimed to be accurately reporting what is going on in Egypt while simultaneously presenting a very polished image of the military rulers. Despite their propaganda the public’s response to these online posts have been heterogeneous because the followers of these networks are from both camps (Islamists and liberals), which is quite distinct from other Facebook pages where followers tend to be homogeneous in their outlooks and their beliefs.

The third pro-military media network with a strong Facebook presence is the ‘Elwafd gate’ network and this site has almost 2.5 million followers on Facebook alone. ‘Elwafd gate’ has sought to attack Ikhwan by focusing its energy on posting biased information about the group, such as associating them with terrorist organisations such as al-Qaida and Hamas.

Networks such as this one played a pivotal role in returning the military regime after galvanising publics to take over public squares on ‘June 30’ calling for an end to the rule of Ikhwan.

In opposition to these online attacks Islamists have also taken up a strong presence online. For example the Rassd News Network (RNN) emerged on Facebook on 25 January 2011 and then became one of the biggest civil journalism projects of the contemporary world (see Figure 4.17)

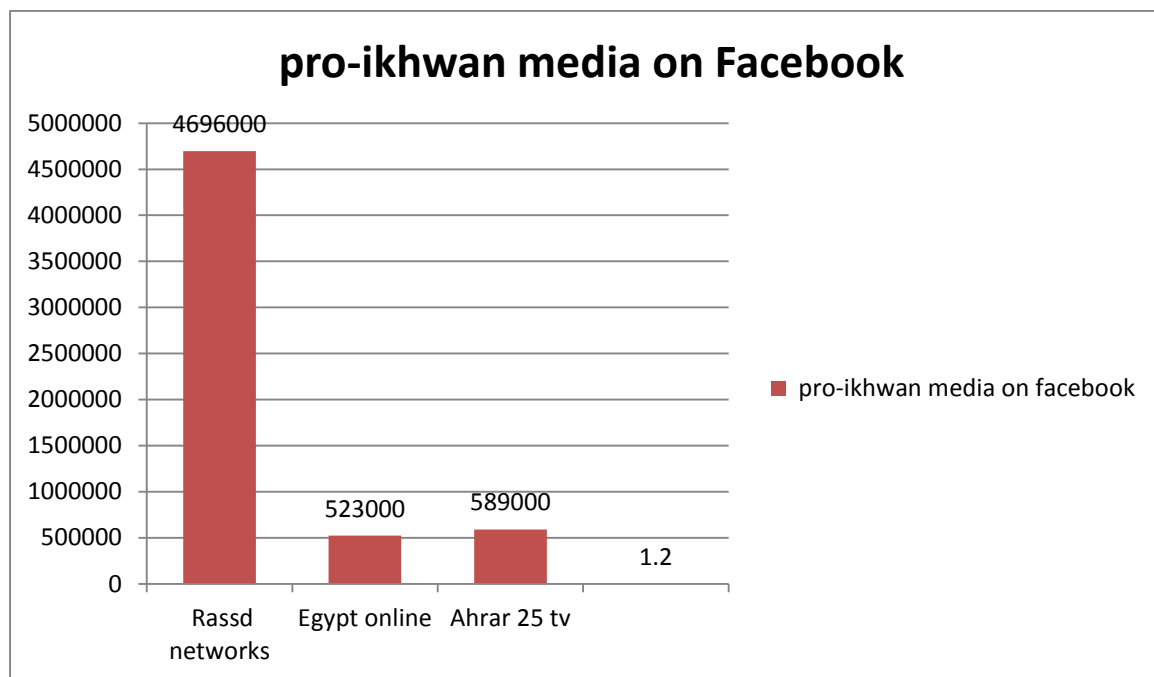


Figure 4.17: Members numbers of pro-Ikhwan media networks on Facebook as of January 2014

The creators of RNN aimed to create an alternative form of journalism which covered events which were subject to state censorship or the self-censorship of established media – both which are prevalent in the Middle East. As described by Ghonim they sought to become, ‘a source of information not a source of analysis or bias’ (2012: 170). Since the RNN’s network launch coincided with the Egyptian revolution it managed to compete with the state-controlled media such as the Egyptian newspapers, *Al ahram*, *Al Dostour*, and *Misr Al Youm*. Zweiri and Murphy contend, ‘the network took on the role of powerful organizations in bringing the action and fears into the homes of viewers by posting the events immediately as they unfolded’ (2011: 21). During the second and third waves of social unrest RNN appeared to be the most powerful news networks on Facebook because member numbers reached an

incredible 5 million people. The network therefore played a crucial role in revealing the political agenda of the Egyptian military through video leaks known as el-Sisileaks. Alongside RNN other pro-Ikhwan media Facebook networks, such as ‘Egypt online’ and ‘Ahrar 25 TV’, emerged to, like RNN, reach an audience eager to hear non-biased news about on-the-ground developments. In Egypt under the military rule, however, you were either considered to be ‘with the military’ or ‘against the military’ and in this categorisation credible, trustworthy and resilient news was considered to be the latter. Such media networks, therefore, faced terrible consequences and this was the case with the RNN news network when the co-founders of the network were prosecuted and then faced long jail terms.

4.11 Facebook Trends Used by the two Parties

During the Egyptian revolution Facebook became the new battleground between the media networks of both camps as pro-Ikhwan and pro-military networks sought to compete for people and a monopolisation of ideology in the virtual sphere. They each tried to control information flows in an attempt to recruit more members to their cause and thus establish massive networks of people which could influence the control of power. Though my personal observations of the revolutionaries’ (anti coup) and counter-revolutionaries’ (military and liberals) Facebook pages I have come to be acquainted with the dominant narratives which are used by both camps in order to achieve their political goals (see Figure 4.18).



Figure 4.18: Narratives used by the pro-military Facebook networks during the second and third waves of social unrest in Egypt.

The main four narratives used by pro-military social networks during the second and third waves of social unrest were:

1. **Defame Ikhwan:** The image of Ikhwan as moderate Islamic political party was defamed by pro-military social media networks. These networks spread Ikhwanophobia across the region using three main steps. First, Ikhwan was accused of acting on behalf Iran Mullahs. This was done through the portrayal of Egypt as the next Iran and a portrayal of their revolution as being an Islamic one. Second, the networks gave them impression that Ikhwan had been outlawed by the interim government for the reason that they were deemed to be a terrorist group. This was reflected in the social networks of pro-military groups in December 2013 through the insinuation that Ikhwan leaders had been arrested because of their relationships with al-Qaeda and with Islamic Hamas in Gaza. Third, pro-military networks portrayed Ikhwan using the symbol of ‘the four finger victory sign of Ikhwan’, that is, as people who burn the flag, betray the country, kill the youth of the country and plot deceptions (see Figure 4.19).



Figure 4.19: The four Ikhwan fingers sign used as a part of the defamation process against Ikhwan

2. **Praise the military:** General el-Sisi was praised on pro-military social networks and glorified as ‘the conqueror of the enemies’. Pro-military networks justify the killing of Ikhwan members by the military and have portrayed the military as the morally responsible members of Egyptian society who keep the peace and protect Egypt from international terrorism. Military personnel have been portrayed as ‘border protectors’ who keep people safe from outside enemies.
3. **Distribute disinformation and propaganda:** Pro-military networks have failed to acknowledge the wrongdoings which have been performed on the part of the military. Alternatively they have directed their ire toward the victims of military brutality, that is, Morsi's supporters. By adopting the military's viewpoint that pro-Morsi protesters have tried to raid military facilities and spread violence in the society, many Egyptian media outlets have justified or even praised the brave actions of the army in killing and imprisoning the leaders of Ikhwan.
4. **Diffuse hate speech against Ikhwan:** Some anti-Ikhwan clerics, such as Ali Jonnah, the former Mufti of Egypt, have posted inflammatory comments about Ikhwan such as claiming they are ‘dogs’ who should be killed wherever they are found. Also ‘abduct Ikhwan [and] cut [off] his testicles [to][...] stop him breeding’ or ‘exile him’ (see Figure 4.20). The military regime has committed horrifying atrocities against pro-Ikhwan supporters and then justified their killing by referring to the comments of pro-military clerics.



Figure 4.20: Campaign ‘Abduct Ikhwan, shared on the ‘We all for Egypt’ social network

Just as the pro-military networks have predominant narratives so do the pro-Ikhwan sites and the dominant rhetoric of these groups are portrayed in Figure 4.21.

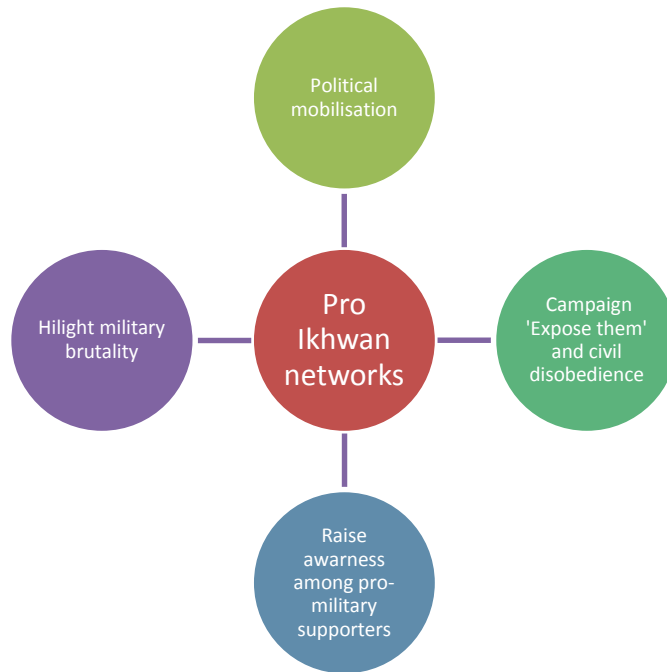


Figure 4.21: Narratives used by pro-Ikhwan Facebook networks

4.12 The Four Common Narratives Used by the Pro-Ikhwan Groups are:

1. **A call for political mobilisation:** since the ousting of President Morsi pro-Ikhwan networks have put out daily calls for political mobilisation. Egyptian Islamists and other supporters of Morsi remain steadfast in their rejection of what they call a ‘military coup’, and refuse to acknowledge the military-backed interim president Adli Mansour and his newly-appointed vice president and prime minister as legitimate. Morsi's supporters have staged a series of mass rallies in Cairo, demanding the reinstatement of the ousted president (see Figure 4.22).



Figure 4.22: Ultras Morsian network’s call for political mobilisation urging people to meet at Tahrir square on Friday 11 October 2013.

Throughout the duration of the writing of this thesis between February 2013 and February 2014 these calls for action have transformed from being calls for peaceful protests into calls for more violent actions. For example postings about the third anniversary of the Egyptian revolution celebration on 25 January 2014 included warnings directed at the military regime claiming that protesters would use violent acts to respond to any military brutality. Claims on the White block network were that protestors would, if incited, burn police cars and armoured vehicles, abduct military personnel, use Molotov Cocktails and attack police stations.

2. **Highlight military brutality:** Pro-Ikhwan social network sites have documented military brutality such as the brutal crackdowns on peaceful protests held in Rabea and Elnahda squares when many thousands of peaceful protesters were killed. Such documentation has raised international awareness of the Egyptian military's use of excessive force in response to protests held in city squares (see Figure 4.23). YouTube videos, photos, and voice memos were captured by protesters and posted daily in an attempt to persuade followers to denounce military rule.



Figure 4.23: International news headlines of the military crackdowns on 14 August 2013

3. **Raise awareness among pro-military supporters:** using pro-Ikhwan social networks messages were sent to encourage pro-military supporters not to listen to media presented by pro-military networks and satellite channels. This campaign was called 'esthmar elshaeb' (donkynise the people), suggesting that people become

mindless and asses by following the media produced by pro-military networks (see Figure 4.24).



Figure 4.24: Protestors holding up sign advertising the 'esthmar elshaeb' campaign launched by pro-Ikhwan social networks

Such campaigns have succeeded in converting some liberal political groups to the pro-Ikhwan cause. These groups include the 'April 6 youth movement', 'Christians against the coup', 'Salafies', 'Ultrasians' and 'Socialists'. As a result of this campaign people from all of these groups decided to join the nationwide protest held on 25 January 2014 under the motto 'victory or martyrdom' (see figure 4.25).



Figure 4.25: The president Facebook page on 23 January 2014

4. **Campaign 'Expose them' and civil disobedience:** a campaign titled 'Expose them' was initiated by a number of pro- Ikhwan Facebook networks and its aim was to identify police and military personnel who were directly involved in the killing of Ikhwan supporters during peaceful protests. For this campaign Ikhwan networks have provided photos, telephone numbers and addresses of the offenders and asked their followers to seek revenge. This campaign has intimidated the Egyptian military and made them fear for the safety of their men (see Figure 4.26).



Figure 4.26: An image from the 'We are all Ala Sadik' Facebook network on January 3, 2014.

Alongside this campaign one of civil disobedience has also been launched which calls for Ikhwan supporters to turn-off mobile phones, to stay in the metro in order to disrupt regular commuting routes, to stop cars on highways, to close businesses and to boycott particular products and the military's media. This campaign has spread virally on pro-Ikhwan social networks and is significantly disrupting the economy of the country.

4.13 The Clashing of Networks

The Egyptian uprisings have presented an interesting example of the complex power relations which can operate in a time of crisis between different social media networks. The hostility between adversaries, either on social media networks or on traditional media, have resulted in political triumphs which have divided the society at large and made true the famous Egyptian slogan, 'you are people and we are people'. Facebook has played an important role in this power struggle and the analysis conducted above sought to determine whether the social media platform has acted as a major catalyst for political mobilisation and for shifting the balance of power between the ruling military regime and civilian activists. Figure 4.27 below is a pictorial summary of the process by which networks have become a key player in generating and shifting power, and the figure below it, Figure 4.28, graphically represents the scale at which the power operates in and between the revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries.

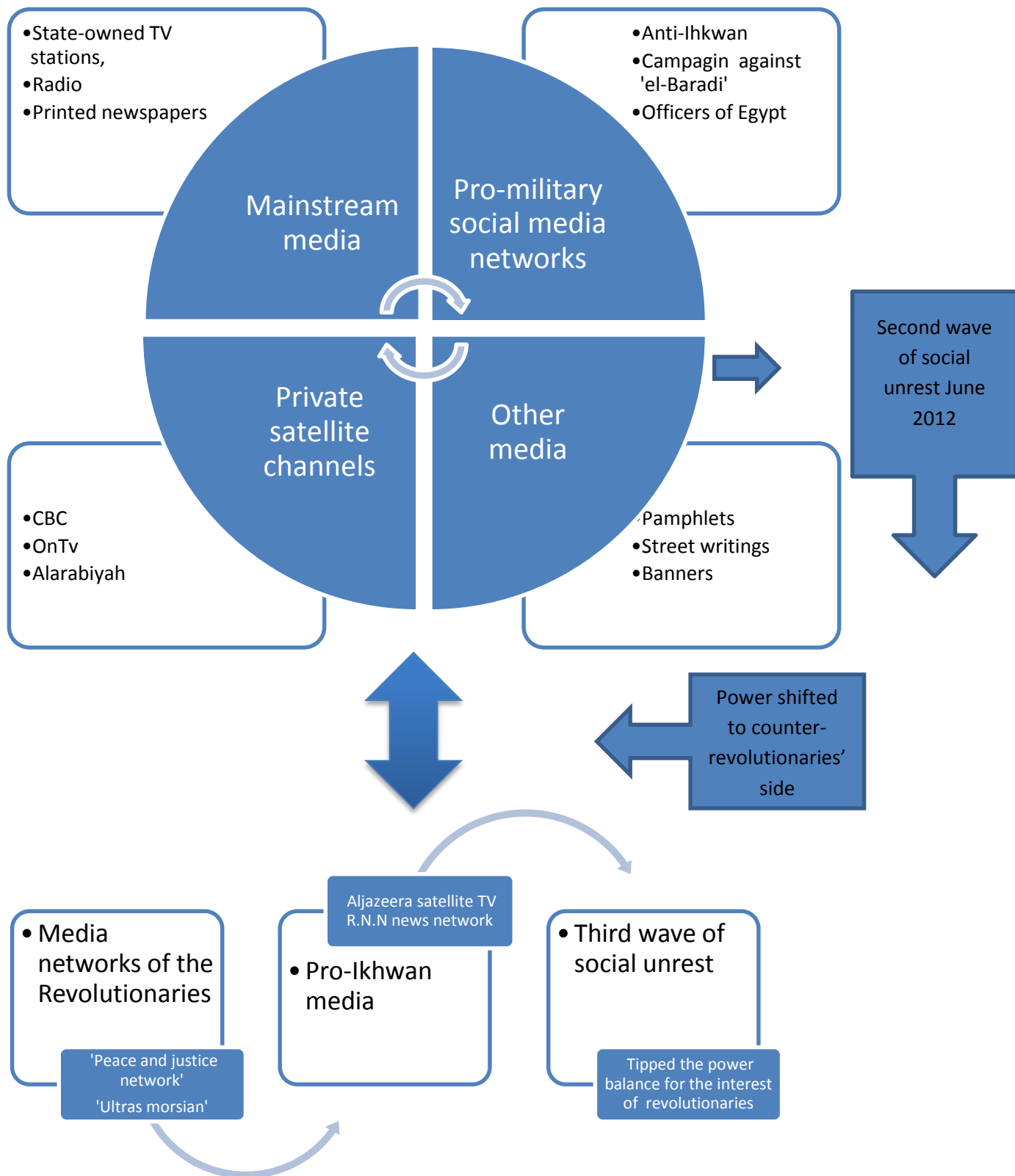


Figure 4.27: The role of the media in the political struggle in Egypt 2012-2014.

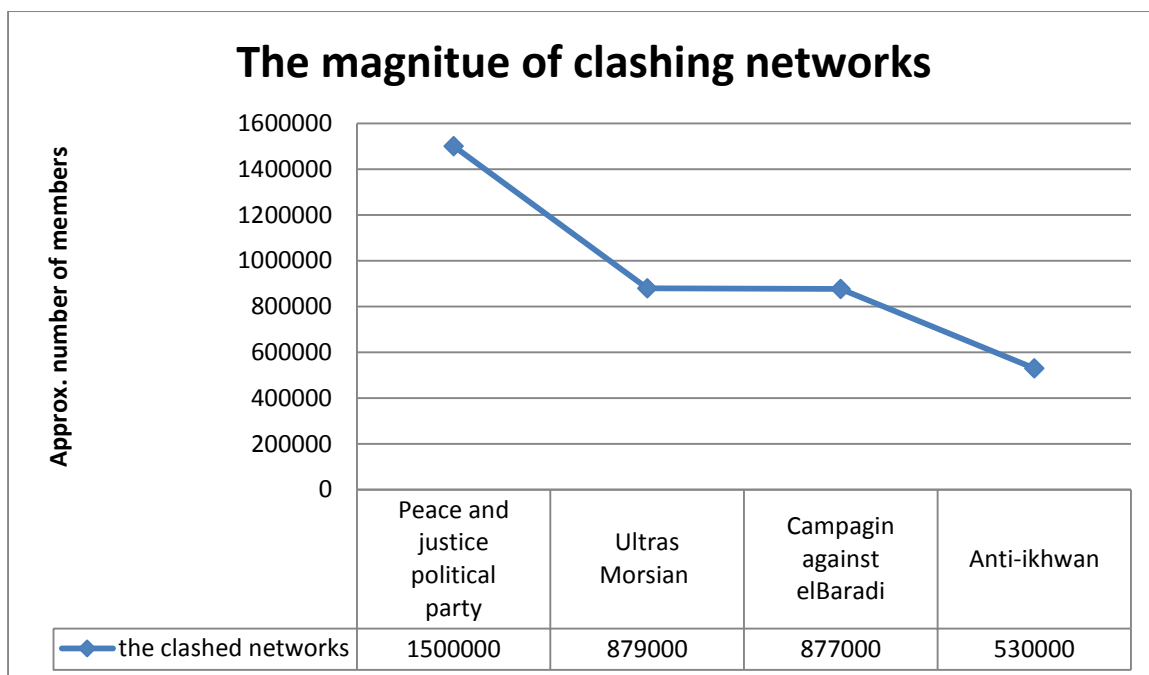


Figure 4.28: The clashing of the largest networks on Facebook

As the networks have clashed a new form of antagonism has developed between adversaries. Through an almost daily interaction between social networks the once heterogeneous online social environment has, transformed into a situation where networks are against networks, and individuals against individuals. This antagonism has then come to be reflected in offline practices such as killing, torture and detentions.

Despite the scale of the interactions between the military’s mainstream media and social media networks in comparison to the smaller size of the pro-Ikhwan media forums the military did not succeed in subduing the mass protests nor did they succeed in convincing the international community that what happened on ‘June 30’ was a revolution and not a military coup. In the very contemporary context of February 2014 the call for mass mobilisation for the third anniversary of the Egyptian revolution shows the continuing perseverance and power of the pro-Ikhwan networks in resisting the massive pro-military media. They continue to work to agitate the Egyptian streets and to end military rule.

Twitter feed and YouTube videos were also played a critical role in information dissemination and raise awareness – but they were less effective compare to Facebook political power. In the next two sections I highlight the role played by those two social networks.

4.14 Twitter Feed

Twitter is a real time information network and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters. These messages are known as ‘tweets’ (Wikipedia). With almost 500 million active users worldwide Twitter is considered the second largest social media platform. In the Arab world Twitter was first harnessed by high profile Arab elites who had access to the internet from both home and work. For the rest of the population the adoption of social media in general, and Twitter in particular, was slow because internet prices tend to be high in the Arab world and a significant proportion of the population are illiterate, both literally and digitally. As Philip Howard said, ‘these are the communication tools for the wealthy, urban, educated elites whose loyalties or defection will make or break authoritarian rule’ (2011: 11). The means by which Twitter was adopted by the middle class in Egypt was through the expansion of internet cafés across the country which offered cheap, reliable and fast internet services.

According to the Dubai School of Government (2011), ‘the estimated number of active Twitter users in the Arab region at the end of March 2011 was 1,150,292 and the number of Twitter users in Egypt was 131,204’. Mashable (2011) reported that the active Twitter users were 15,000. According to the Arab social media report (2011), ‘the most popular trending hashtags across the Arab region in the first quarter were #egypt (with 1.4 million mentions in the tweets generated during this period), #jan25 (with 1.2. million mentions), #Libya (with 990,000 mentions), #bahrain (640,000 mentions), and #protest (620,000)’ (see Figure 4.29).

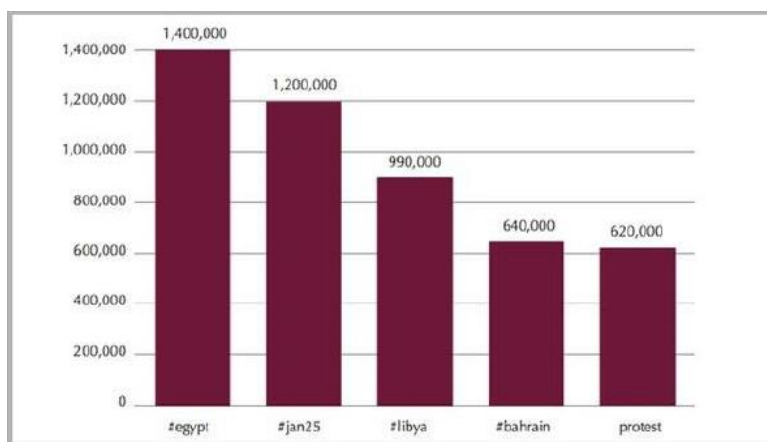


Figure 4.29: top Twitter trends in the MENA region 2011

The study of Twitter trends during the Egyptian uprisings has attracted the attention of a number of scholars from many different disciplines including political science, communications and sociology. Most scholars and think tank institutions have tried to draw a connection between technology and political change in order to determine whether these networks were a driving force behind the Arab Spring uprisings. International and local study centres, such as the Berkman Centre at Harvard University, the Dubai School of Government and the Tahrir data project, as well as independent scholars and researchers (e.g. Howard and Hussein 2011, Campbell 2011 and Lotan et al. 2011) have gathered empirical data on media use during the Egyptian revolution of January 2011. Further, in a recent study (August 2013) conducted by Kiran Garimella, at Qatar Computing Research Institute, and Alaa Batyneh, at Al Jazeera, addressed a different question and focused on the dynamics of the polarisation of people in Egyptian society. Their research considered whether Islamists and secularists use the same hashtags and their studies went a long way in gauging the political tension between groups and whether the situation was influenced by online data.

Through a study of two hashtags, #jan 25 and #egypt I was able to determine that Twitter aided Egyptian civilian activists in their struggle against their authoritarian regime in five main ways:

a) Twitter amplified calls for political mobilisation. Twitter worked in concert with other social media platforms in facilitating the call for mobilisation. Many tweets were posted on #Egypt and #Jan25 repeatedly and reminded people of the protest on Jan 25th. For example, @RamiRaouf posted a tweet on Jan 24th, ‘dear friends, in case if u don’t know, tomorrow #jan25 demonstrations will take place in #Egypt against unemployment, corruption & torture’, and @KhaledEibid tweeted ‘January 25 is OUR DAY Egypt #Jan25 #Egypt’.

Moreover, on Jan 25th, when Egyptians marched into Tahrir square, Twitter played the most significant role in recruiting people to join in by disseminating information of what was happening in real time.

b) Twitter became a coordination and organisation mechanism. Twitter worked like a high frequency wireless radio. In the world of Twitter users did not need to have or know the other users’ names and phone numbers in order to tell them what was going on the streets of Cairo and in Tahrir square. Activists on the streets with smart phones were able to direct events by posting details on designated hashtags in order to direct particular protests. For example

@khalawa69 tweeted ‘everyone outside please cluster together, stay in groups during the night and take shifts’.

c) Twitter allowed for information dissemination. During the events of the Jan 25 uprisings Twitter worked as a real time news source and live news feed. This was all done without the help or need for professional journalists. Kwak et al. (2010) contend that ‘the non-reciprocal nature of information sharing on Twitter means that it operates more like an information-sharing network than a social network, complete with well-positioned influencers who can shape how information flows’ (cited in Lotan et al. 2011). During the uprisings the beauty of Twitter feeds were that the information provided through them was the main source of news for local and international news organisations. For example, while Aljazeera crew were banned from filming in Egypt and its bureau office shut down by the Egyptian authorities, they became heavily dependent on information coming from the activists in the streets. For instance, @zangabeel tweeted ‘Now, I really BELIEVE it. The #Revolution will NOT be Televised it will be live on twitter #jan25 #Egypt’. Ben Waderman, of CNN Tweet @bencnn, tweeted, ‘Demonstrations all over Egypt police seem unsure of how to react. I have seen that look before. Can you say Tsunami? #jan25’.

d) Twitter connected the world. The main trait of Twitter is that it has no limits or geographical boundaries. It therefore diminishes space and time barriers by connecting every person who joins the platform. Twitter has thus helped the revolutionaries in many ways. It has broken the monopoly over information, it has embarrassed regimes by exposing their use of excessive force and it has involved the international community who have put pressure on the regime. As @gyonis (2011) tweeted, ‘nothing on TV about jan25 not even on the Egyptian TV channels. If it wasn’t on Twitter we probably would never know# Egypt #media’.

e) Twitter acted as a platform for political debate. During the second and third waves of social unrest in Egypt, Twitter played a central role in enhancing the political debate between liberals and Islamists. The @Elbaradi and @Morsi online portals became the centre of this debate as the supporters of each group tweeted and re-tweeted the debate between the two portals in order to rally support and justify their positions. Another debated started between Egyptian Twitter users and the US embassy. For example one tweet published in Arabic by the US Embassy Cairo Twitter account was, ‘One of the revolution's ambitions is guaranteeing that power is neither concentrated in neither one hand nor one entity’. After the

debate started between Egyptian Twitter users and the embassy many Twitter users expressed their anger towards the United States' stance on democracy and their support of the Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi and his administration. For example one tweet by Osama ElBatrik @OBatrik (2013) was, 'Please stop supporting the fascist Muslim Brotherhood. We used to think the US were supporters of Democracy. Now prove it!'. This was in response to the US Embassy's tweet reproduced above.

f) Speak to tweet: On January 27, 2011, the Egyptian government shut down most of the country's Internet and cell phone service, causing a 90 percent drop in data traffic to and from Egypt within a few hours. A couple of days later, Google Inc. and Twitter Inc. announced that they had already gone live with a speak-to-tweet service that Egyptians could use to stay connected via Twitter by simply calling one of the provided phone numbers, without the need for an Internet or cell phone connection. This service, however, enabled Egyptian digital activists to live reporting from Tahrir square which also break the barrier of state control information flows.

4.15 YouTube Videos

YouTube is considered the largest video sharing online portal. It was created in 2005 and is owned by Google Inc. Among the 30 million YouTube users in Egypt there are 15 million who use the platform to follow the latest political events and news about Egypt (Blogsq 2013). According to DSG Report in Egypt (2012), in the MENA region, 'YouTube playbacks doubled in the last year There are 167 Million video views a day in MENA, putting the region in the number two spot in the world (behind the U.S. and ahead of Brazil)'. Like Facebook and Twitter, YouTube has been the target of constant police surveillance and has been restricted because of its use as a political tool. For example, in 2007 the Tunisian government blocked YouTube for 'fears that social media [was] strengthening the bonds of communication between citizens in ways not easily monitored and managed by the state' (Howard and Hussein 2011: 18). During the first wave of the Egyptian uprisings Howard and Hussein observed four major types of content that characterised Egyptian videos that had gone viral: 'raw protest and mobilization footage; citizen commentary; political punditry; and [s]oundtracks for the revolution'. Raw protest and mobilisation footage was the most common, with one example being the viewing of just 23 videos by nearly 5.5 million viewers (2011: 22). During the three waves of social unrest in Egypt YouTube has played an important role in shifting the power dynamics from the regime to Egyptian activists.

YouTube became a particularly important tool for informing the world of Egypt's uprisings. Research by Howard and Hussein (2011) identifies the top viral videos as of June 2011 (see Figure 4.30).

| Title | Channel | Views | Date |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Protest in Egypt - Jan 25, 2011 | lukasjakubicka | 676,701 | 25-Jan-11 |
| Day of anger in Egypt | ReutersVideo | 217,518 | 25-Jan-11 |
| Egypt's Protests Day of Anger Riots 25 Jan 2011 | AusNetwork | 110,162 | 25-Jan-11 |
| Demonstrations Rare Raw Footage | | | |
| The Most AMAZING video on the Internet #Egypt #jan25 | hadi15 | 2,127,384 | 27-Jan-11 |
| Man Shot in Egypt | NeroAlex1988 | 154,823 | 27-Jan-11 |
| Egypt Unrest: Video of police killing teen protester, riots aftermath | RussiaToday | 397,099 | 28-Jan-11 |
| 28th Jan. 2011 - Storyful - Egypt Cairo uprising protest video - Mohamed Ibrahim Elmasry | storyful | 285,628 | 28-Jan-11 |
| Demanding change in Egypt | AlJazeeraEnglish | 111,908 | 28-Jan-11 |
| Egyptians renew protests after curfew | AlJazeeraEnglish | 106,191 | 28-Jan-11 |
| Juju's message to Mubarak | oneholysinner | 275,302 | 29-Jan-11 |
| Video of Egypt's bloody clashes as protesters defy curfew in Cairo | RussiaToday | 204,736 | 30-Jan-11 |
| Video of fighter jets & choppers over Cairo as military tries to take control | RussiaToday | 167,422 | 30-Jan-11 |
| Egyptian Revolution 2011 COMPLETE. World MUST MUST watch this. Freedom for All! | eveinsidefilm | 484,043 | 1-Feb-11 |
| 'March of Millions' in Cairo as Egypt riots death toll reaches 300 | RussiaToday | 123,965 | 1-Feb-11 |
| Video of fierce Egypt clashes as pro-govt crowds attack anti-Mubarak protesters | RussiaToday | 322,708 | 2-Feb-11 |
| Fourth Horseman (death) Egyptian riots. Full Original Video | PunkersTV | 1,551,796 | 3-Feb-11 |

Figure 4.30: The most watched YouTube videos of the 'Jan 25' uprisings. Source, Howard and Hussein 2011

How YouTube videos contributed to the realm of digital activism during the Egyptian uprisings can be summarised in four main points.

a) Instant witness: YouTube almost daily documented events of the revolution and supported facts with tangible evidence. Police brutality, humiliation and daily killings were uploaded instantly by digital activists who recorded events using mobile phones. For example, the pictures of Khaled Said's shattered head was watched by nearly half million Egyptians before the 25 Jan 2011 day of protest. Another example is the mass killing of peaceful protesters in Rabiah Adawyah square which was captured on film and then spread in a viral manner through YouTube. This led to local and international condemnation of the excessive force used by the military regime in response to the actions of peaceful protesters.

b) Main source of news: YouTube, and the production of instant videos, has played a key role in supporting news organisations, and particularly when journalists were refused entry and thus most media coverage came from state-controlled media. Arab satellite channels like

Aljazeera and Al-Arabiya depended heavily on YouTube as the main news source. YouTube was thus paramount for showing the world what was really happening in Egypt.

c) A medium of political mobilisation: YouTube has been important for generating numbers at protests. For example April 6th youth movement activist Asma Mahfouz posted a video on YouTube in order to promote the call for a public protest on 25 Jan 2011. This video had an enormous impact and helped to galvanise political protests in Egypt. According to Castells Mahfouz's posting of the video was a key catalyst video for mobilising action for political change in Egypt (Castells 2012).

d) Break the monopoly of state media: YouTube has played a significant role in dismantling the information dissemination barrier established by state-controlled media. YouTube has therefore helped people to document and display what is really happening in Egypt. Digital activists and protesters equipped with mobile phones have recorded events and then directly uploaded these videos to YouTube. Unfortunately this has meant that protesters holding mobile phones have become the target of harsh treatment by police who are aware of the phone's potential for disseminating the facts. In Egypt and Tunisia the result has been that mobile phones have been confiscated during protests, while in Syria activists caught with mobile phones are charged with treason and in many cases killed in the spot. YouTube videos have helped protesters transmit important visual information to followers, both locally and internationally, without the need to travel. This has allowed geographical and political barriers to be transgressed (Essam Mansour 2012). Actually the beauty of YouTube is that, as a kind of convergence of Facebook and Twitter, the videos can be displayed at very low costs. It is a form of information dissemination without travel, a form of protest without any interaction with police and the crackdowns they impose.

4.16 Conclusion

In this chapter an attempt was made to examine the extent to which social media contributed to the Arab Spring uprisings by analysing primary data retrievable from social media sites. This study revealed how social media contributed to the events of the Egyptian uprisings in both positive and negative ways. The primary data revealed that social media networks have gone through four distinct phases: outrage and hope, instability and distrust, disinformation and criticism, and antagonism and hate. As these phases have been enacted during the three waves of social unrest in Egypt the power dynamics between civilian activists and the Egyptian regime have changed.

Furthermore, the waves of political unrest in Egypt have disrupted the monopoly of power of dominant news networks and left them now struggling to control the flow of information. Although the military has maintained and employed most of the country's media networks, and although they have used military force to crush Ikhwan opposition in order to bring stability to the country, the power dynamic on the streets of Egypt has shifted in favour of pro-democracy groups. As shown in this chapter this has been achieved through four main processes. First, pro-Ikhwan social networks have succeeded in mobilising people to engage in political action leading to numerous protests being held on the streets of Egypt since the military coup on 3 July 2013. Second, campaigns, such as the one of civil disobedience, which have paralysed the economic system of the country. Third, the military's use of excessive force against peaceful protesters being broadcast to the international community and world leaders who have responded by pressuring Egyptian leaders to return peace to the country. And forth, pro-Ikhwan networks being successful in persuading members of some opposition groups to support their cause; this resulted in a growth of numbers at the 25 January 2014 protests which sought to bring down the military regime. Such members have also been led to rethink their support for the political actions which ousted president Morsi.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that in 2004 the rise of web 2.0 platforms created a new space for the quest for political freedom in the Arab world. The use of these platforms for political purposes commenced in 2008, four years after their emergence, and since this time Arab youth have widely adopted the new medium of communication to challenge their authoritarian regimes' monopoly of information dissemination and to galvanise publics for political protests. The rapid downfall of some Arab leaders during the events of the Arab Spring uprisings has surprised some academics, researchers and political commentators and such stakeholders have noted the role played by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in bringing about such rapid and dramatic change. Despite these triumphs in Egypt the use of these platforms as 'liberation technologies' has been short-lived because social media has come to be a domain of struggle between the military rulers and pro-democracy activists as they each seek their political outcomes.

While investigating the role web 2.0 platforms have played in the unfolding events of the Egyptian uprisings, I have observed the transformation in the way they are used. They have gone from being used by civilian activists for the promotion of revolutionary ideals (freedom, dignity and social justice) to becoming a space of political polarisation where struggles for power are played out. This transformation was most distinct in the aftermath of Mubarak's ousting on 11 February 2011. During this period 'networks of outrage and hope' transformed into clashing networks, or 'networks of antagonism and hate'. During the Egyptian uprisings the rapid changes in the media environment has divided Egyptian society at both the macro and micro levels. Social media networks in general, and mainstream media in particular, have enhanced social fragmentations inciting conflict between liberals and Islamists, and even between family members, depending on which media an individual follows or watches. The Egyptian uprisings became even more complex when the revolution of 25 January led to a counter-revolution which resulted in the ousting of the first elected president. Ironically, some of the members of the social media sites which aided this counter revolution, such as the 'April 6 movement', have come to regret the role they played in the second wave of unrest in 2012 and are now acting as revolutionaries who are attempting to bring down the military regime during the continuing third wave of social unrest.

In this thesis I examined the role social media networks played in the Egyptian uprisings during the three waves of social unrest in 2011, 2012 and 2013. I determined the role of the social media networks by analysing the content of popular Facebook pages and by examining a cross-section of secondary sources taken from the mainstream media and from academic journals. This concluding chapter is composed of two sections. First is a recapping of the research questions and the main findings found in response to these questions. The second is a study of the research limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

The Research Questions and Findings

This study was driven by two main questions:

1. In what ways have social media networks worked as a catalyst for political mobilisation? To what extent did social media networks contribute to the Arab spring revolutions?
2. Has social media shifted the balance of power from the state government to its people? How have social media technologies and cultures shaped the production of networks of antagonism and hate?

To address these questions I examined how the narratives of dominant social media networks sought to aid the democratisation movement during the Egyptian uprisings and how the new information communication technologies played a significant role in catalysing publics for street protests.

In Chapter 2 an in-depth literature review of qualitative evidence revealed how important an access to the internet and information communication technologies (ICTs) is for civilian activists, and the existing scholarship showed how the use of social media networks has played a major role in shifting the balance of power from the Egyptian authoritarian regime to the people and then later shifted it back again. The literature revealed how such technologies, and their use, have led to the development of a networked society, a new Egyptian public sphere. As various researchers have shown, this public sphere has allowed people to share common grievances and has thus become a united force against the authoritarian regime. Chapter Two concluded with an outline of those studies which have shown that as both pro-democracy and pro-military actors have come to access digital communication technologies new forms of conflict have emerged on Facebook. I summarised these conflicts as being categorised into three main forms: networks versus the state, networks versus networks and state versus networks. As I state at the end of this chapter 2

believe this collapse of the new Egyptian public sphere means that Facebook and other social media have become sites of hatred and antagonism.

An in-depth analysis of the role of Aljazeera, WikiLeaks and Hacktivist groups formed the focus of Chapter Three. In this chapter I showed how all of these forms of media have significantly contributed to the Egyptian revolutions. For instance I found that Aljazeera was the only television channel presenting the Ikhwan point of view and what was really happening on the ground. This was at a time when all of Egypt's mainstream channels were dominating information dissemination and covering up the authoritarian regime's brutality. In early 2014 this situation is now very different. According to the international IPSOS survey (2014) 'Aljazeera Egypt Mubasher', a channel of Aljazeera, is the most watched TV channel in Egypt. In regards to WikiLeaks and Anonymous, I found that they played a less significant role and for a shorter time period. Nevertheless these media, along with Aljazeera, were vitally important for political change.

In Chapter Four I outlined how Facebook has transformed the power dynamics in Egypt and how this how occurred in four phases (outrage and hope, instability and distrust, disinformation and criticism and antagonism and hate). During these four phases, and over the course of the Egyptian revolutions, social networks transformed from being ones of 'outrage and hope' to ones of 'antagonism and hate'. Chapter four also included an analysis of scholarly literature on the role of web 2.0 in empowering civilian activists at the expense of authoritarian Arab regimes. It was found that the use web 2.0 was crucial in bringing about political change in Egypt but, on the other hand, it also played a role in reversing political improvements. As Faysal el-Qasem (2014) noted, 'social media can start a revolution, also it can convince revolutionaries to counter their revolution'. Also it was noted in Chapter Two that social media networks can act as 'tools of liberation' or 'tools of oppression' when used by the authoritarian regimes themselves. The networks, therefore, have divided Egyptian society into pro-Ikhwan and pro-military political structures and ironically have come to strengthen the power of the new military rulers. Overall, however, the social networks have increased people's participation in political debate and change.

In Chapter Four I examined Facebook datasets. From this study it became clear that between 2011 and early 2014 power constantly shifted as different political groups clashed on Facebook. As a result a political polarisation has developed as the two camps use the social

media platform to achieve different political goals. It is clear that digital information infrastructure has come to be a tool which is regularly used for political disagreements.

My comparison of the content of the Facebook pages of both pro-military and pro-Ikhwan groups showed that pro-Ikhwan is more visible and engaged in the arena of Facebook compared to the pro-military presence. This comparison of Facebook narratives was powerful because it challenged the findings of my theoretical approach, and the knowledge that communication is most powerful through the strength of weak ties, because the current political situation suggests that such communication is not as powerful as originally surmised. Although the pro-Ikhwan social networks have been highly successful in organising the uprisings, the current situation in Egypt makes it clear that social media has not been as useful as originally thought in translating the needs and demands of protesters into political reality.

In the first part of 2014 it is clear that the military rulers of Egypt still possess the most power, and this is the case even though the ‘tools of empowerment’ have diversified and advanced. Despite this, in a globalised world marked by constant transnational flows of information the power of civilian activists and pro-democracy actors should not be underestimated. It is these actors who continue to resist the military power in Egypt and who strengthen civilian society; it is these actors who continue to weaken the power of repressive regimes. Currently in Egypt the military rulers have succeeded in spreading rumours through social networks which have had a great impact on any political mobilisation being organised as part of the third wave of social unrest. The military’s implementation of protest laws, curfews, and crackdowns on Facebook networks has limited people’s participation on Facebook and thus has led to the emergence of violent groups such as ‘Edam’ (‘hang them’), ‘Molotov’ and ‘Wale’e’ (‘burn them’). The development of these groups has led to a new phase of violent acts of resistance followed by violent acts of retaliation. Overall this has greatly destabilised the country.

In general, during all three revolutions, social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have been important vehicles for spreading news reports about the social uprisings, in highlighting police brutality and in catalysing publics for political mobilisation. It is difficult to say whether the revolutions would have happened without digital media. In Libya and Yemen, for example, political change has occurred despite the low use of internet technology, a significant digital divide and a high level of illiteracy. On the other hand, in

Bahrain, where most people have access to the internet the revolution attempted there failed. This thesis, which has focused on Egypt, has been an initial overview. The trends it outlines suggest what occurs in Egypt going forward is difficult to predict. Certainly a continuing study of Facebook narratives, as was done in this thesis, can help in gaining an understanding of how the political polarisation in the country changes and to test the changing direction of the uprisings in terms of the ebb and flow of power relations.

While the ethnographic approach used in this thesis has been enlightening, it does have some limitations, and these are outlined in the second half of this conclusion.

Thesis limitations and future research

There were three main limitations in this study:

1. Unlike Twitter, a number of privacy laws protect private Facebook pages meaning that a number of analytical tools are only available to Facebook administrators. Further Facebook APIs are only available for personal use. Due to these limitation I could not study general statistical data such as the gender of uses, people's geographical locations and the number of shares, comments and likes (the 'shares' number listed in Chapter Four are only general statistical information that everyone can gain access to).
2. This study focused on Facebook narratives rather than the statistical information mentioned above, that is the number of likes, shares and comments. The limited time and space of this study meant that large datasets could not be analysed.
3. The multiple platform data which is disseminated everyday through Facebook networks is enormous and as a consequence it has been difficult to track and record most of the presented information. This scale of such a study puts it beyond the capabilities of this thesis.

These limitations reveal some of the weaknesses within this study. While much has been written on the role of social media in recent political events, and while it has been innovative and thought-provoking, there are still a number of unexplored areas in the academic literature. This examination of the role of Facebook in Egypt's uprisings is an initial study that may act as a springboard for further research.

One recommendation for future research is an examination of the shift of online activism from personal computers to mobile phone devices. Recent police crackdowns on Facebook

administrators and attempts to silent Facebook activism, either by shutting Facebook down at the server level, the use of hacktivism or the sending of spam reports to Facebook administrators, means that the Facebook conversations of revolutionaries have moved to mobile phone communications and smart phone applications such as Whatsapp and Viber. This change has become necessary because social networks are now closely monitored by cyber-police and Facebook and Twitter have become media platforms that are largely used to spread propaganda, misinformation and rumours. Mobile phone communication is proving invaluable for digital activism because communication through such means is based on relationships of 'strong ties' between clusters of digital activists, meaning that the information produced is reliable since it is being circulated amongst a trusted circuit of networked friends. Further mobile phone communications are encrypted tools of communication, that is, they are the next generation of technology and are thus opening up new avenues for online political activism. The use of new apps, I hypothesise, will diminish the role of Facebook and Twitter in galvanising publics for political mobilisation. The use of mobile phones for activism is a rich new area of study, and particularly because the empirical evidence demonstrating its influence on political activism is only starting to emerge (Campbell & Kwak 2012, Hestres et.al. 2014). There are thus plenty of opportunities for additional research in the area of mobile phone technologies and their effect on digital activism, on regime policies, and on grassroots political movements.

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