Social Media: The Use of Facebook and Twitter

to Impact Political Unrest in the Middle East through the Power of Collaboration

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By

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Abstract

The power of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are often overlooked and unaccounted for. The revolutionary and unprecedented political changes in the Middle East have changed the way the world uses and now views these platforms.   This study addresses the transformation of both the Middle East and social media, alongside each other. In addition, it discusses how young activists utilized these tools in order to unite and therefore produce radical alteration of Middle Eastern governments, what these governments did in an attempt to preserve control and how the United States got involved.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The Problem

The substantial opportunities of collaboration available to Middle Eastern civilians

through Facebook and Twitter make these social media tools exceptionally powerful, leading to

the potential to cause political change (Ghannam, 2011; Harsch, 2011; Tapscott, 2011).

However, these tools should not be confused with motivations (Ghannam, 2011). Decades of

oppression have spurred civilians to use social media to advance their attempt at democracy.

This recent collaboration has been achieved through shared awareness of Middle Eastern people,

the collective strength of the crowd and increased visibility to the world.

Facebook and Twitter have allowed people in the Middle East to post user-generated

videos, organize protests on the ground, promote their causes to mass audiences and give real-

time updates to people thousands of miles away (Joudeh, 2011). Finally, their voices have been

heard.

Tunisia was the first to succeed—overthrowing Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the President of

the Tunisian Republic for the past 23 years, on January 14, 2011 (Wambugu, 2011). Egypt

followed soon after. On February 11, 2011, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak resigned his

three-decade-long rule after 18 days of non-stop demonstrations (Ghannam, 2011; Harsch,

2011). These victorious conquests have prompted protests in many other countries, most notably

Libya (Harsch, 2011).

Background of the Problem

Many believe that without Facebook and Twitter, these revolutions may not have

happened or, at least, wouldn't have happened so fast (Tapscott, 2011). It's difficult to give a

definite answer to those statements, but it's clear that these platforms have been instrumental in the fight for democracy in the Middle East.

Established less than a decade ago, the impact of these social media sites was surely unforeseen. Facebook, originally named "The facebook," was started in February 2004 by 19-year-old Mark Zuckerberg in his dorm room at Harvard University (Grossman, 2010). Initially, the website was only available to Harvard students, then it was opened up to people in college, then eventually high school students, certain companies, and finally anyone who wanted to create an account (Locke, 2007). Now, there are a reported 600 million+ monthly active users (Carlson, 2011). One out of every twelve people on earth has a Facebook account, speaking 75 languages and all together spending more than 700 billion minutes on the social media website each month (Grossman, 2010).

Twitter, a younger social media website, has also had its share of successes. The world's first tweet was sent on March 21, 2006, by co-founder Jack Dorsey (Shiels, 2011). Five years later, the social media site publishes approximately one billion tweets a week (Shiels, 2011). The company website states that Twitter is now available in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. The website also proclaims, "We believe that the open exchange of information can have a positive global impact. Every day we are inspired by stories of people using Twitter to help make the world a better place in unexpected ways."

Certainly, the overthrow of Tunisian and Egyptian presidents who have been in power for decades was unexpected. However, considering "more than 100 million Arabs—out of 351 region wide—are expected to be using the Internet by 2015" (Ghannam, 2011), "the African country that has the highest percentage of people with Facebook accounts is Tunisia" (Crovitz,

2011), and "an estimated 3.4 million Egyptians are on Facebook…making Egypt the No. 1 user in the Arab world" (Eltahawy, 2010), it was not unfeasible.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a description of the current state of affairs in the Middle East through interviews of three subject matter specialists. Their responses to the questionnaire will be compared and contrasted to findings in the literature. This will provide correlations with the study as well as gaps in the study.

Setting of the Study

Subject matter specialists living in the United States have been chosen to answer the questionnaire. The interviews will be taking place in California, instead of in the Middle East, mainly because of convenience and cost. However, since the study focuses on the magnitude and diffusion of social media, it makes sense to interview specialists far away, further proving that with the dissemination of social media, it has become possible for people in the United States to be aware and knowledgeable of the situation in the Middle East. In addition, considering the study is largely surrounding the phenomenon of Facebook and Twitter, it seems appropriate to interview subject matter specialists in the state where both social media companies are based.

Research Questions

There are five research questions answered in this study:

1. Has social media changed the way we experience events?

2. What makes Facebook and Twitter so powerful and how does it lead to political change?

3. Are authoritarian governments in the Middle East threatened by Facebook and Twitter?

4. Do Internet shutdowns encourage or discourage civilians to use Facebook and Twitter?

5. Why did the United States get involved by helping these repressive countries gain access to social media?

Organization of the Document

There are five chapters included in the document. Chapter I is an introduction of the study. It states the problem, the background of the problem, the purpose of the study, the setting of the study and research questions answered in the study. Chapter II is a review of literature on topics discussed in the study, specifically the history of social media, collaboration in the Middle East through social media, the pressures to authoritarian governments, authoritarian government intervention and United States intervention. Chapter III is the methodology used to conduct the study. This will cover the process of interviewing subject matter specialists and will provide the questionnaire. Chapter IV is the data, which includes data analysis and answers to the questionnaire. Chapter V is the conclusion, which will offer a summary and recommendations. The appendix will follow Chapter V.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The History of Social Media

A medium is defined as "an entity that helps organize a relationship between two other entities" (Artz & Kamalipour, 2005, p. 189). "The term medium stems from the Latin *medius*, which means in the *middle*, or the *middle one*. Media have to do with mediation. Social media mediate the social relationships of human beings" (Artz & Kamalipour, 2005, p. 189).

But what is social media, really? "Social media is the media we use to be social. That's it" (Safko, 2010, p. 3). "The first part of the terminology, *social*, refers to the instinctual needs we humans have to connect with other humans. …The second part of that term refers to the *media* we use with which we make those connections" (Safko, 2010, p. 4).

Social media is "global in nature" (Qualman, 2010, p. 2) and, according to the website Hitwise, "in less than three years, it became the most popular activity on the Web" (Qualman, 2010, p. 3). Traffikd, a social media and Internet marketing blog, "claims there currently are more than 400 social media web sites" (Hinson & Wright, 2009, p. 5).

Two of the most influential social media sites are Facebook and Twitter. Facebook "is by far the most popular and widely used social network" (Safko, 2010, p. 27).

Some statistics about Facebook:

- More than 35 million users update their status each day
- More than 3 billion photos are uploaded each month
- More than 5 billion pieces of content including blog posts, news, web links, notes, photos, and so on, are shared each week
- More than 3.5 million events are created each month (Safko, 2010, p. 27).

Twitter "is the most popular microblogging platform" (Safko, 2010, p. 259). Although it just celebrated its fifth birthday, there are a whopping "190 million people using the micro-blogging website, sending 65 million messages of 140 characters or fewer around the world each day" (Morozov, 2011, para. 3).

These social media sites, however, can be used for more than an update on one's lunch or shopping spree. In fact, these sites have allowed users to change the way they experience events. "'I think that social media allowed me, someone who is sitting in New Jersey with a computer, to experience that moment [in Egypt] as if I were there,'" said blogger Zerlina Maxwell (Bortot, 2011, para. 2).

For many, these platforms have become news telling. Twitter was "credited with being among the first to carry reports of the Mumbai terrorist attacks in November and the ditching of a New York jetliner in the Hudson River in January" (Jackson, 2009, para. 10). Consequently, people are starting to favor the micro-blogging service over traditional news. According to Media Republic (2011), "an online survey…showed that 66% of Egyptian social media users living in Cairo prefer to use Twitter for updates on the latest news on Egypt after January 25th rather than official news websites" (para. 1).

Collaboration in the Middle East through Social Media using Facebook and Twitter

Facebook and Twitter have enabled users to collaborate on issues they feel strongly about. The first step towards collaboration is shared awareness. "An important component in understanding influence is to detect sentiment and opinions. Aggregated opinions over many users is a predictor for an interesting trend in a community" (Java, 2007, p. 1934).

Considering "89% of [survey] respondents [in Egypt] now have a Twitter account, against a near perfect 99% who have a Facebook account" ("66% of Cairenes Use Twitter to

Follow the Latest News of the Egyptian Revolution," 2011, para. 2), the message has been

clear—"young people armed with little more than laptops and mobile phones can help amplify

popular voices for freedom and justice" (Harsch, 2011, para. 9).

 "'Social media helps angry people achieve shared awareness about how many other

people are angry and helps those people take action,'" said Clay Shirky, a professor at New York

University (Crovitz, 2011, para. 7). Recently, several Middle Eastern countries have "show[ed]

that weak ties between people initiated on the web can become strong ties and forge close

relationships that are effective in organizing for social change" (Tapscott, 2011, para. 10)

 Shared awareness gives people courage to act in ways they wouldn't otherwise.

"'Twitter and Facebook let us show people the size of the demonstrations, a size that encouraged

many others to join in,'" said Jiji Ibrahim, a university student in Egypt (Harsch, 2011, para. 3).

These platforms are "empowering people to become the new influencers" (Breakenridge & Solis,

2009, p. xvii).

 With shared awareness comes the collective strength of the crowd. "Young activists in

Egypt, as in nearby Tunisia and elsewhere in the region, were able to use their access to new

social media tools to publicize demands, call demonstrations and win support from broader

sectors of the population" (Harsch, 2011, para. 2).

 Many believe that Khaled Said's fatal beating "sparked a virtual revolution that is

affecting Egypt's tightly controlled society. …Thanks to social media's increasing popularity

and ability to connect activists to ordinary people, Egyptians are protesting police brutality in

unprecedented numbers" (Eltahawy, 2010, para. 1).

The photograph of Said's battered corpse, which disseminated through Facebook and Twitter prompted "a protest outside the Interior Ministry in Cairo, …the largest in living memory against police brutality" (Eltahawy, 2010, para. 10).

Among numerous Facebook pages and groups dedicated to Said, the Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said" received quite a bit of attention. After asking the public to participate in silent protests dressed in black, "Egyptian activists and everyday citizens, including families with children, turned up in unprecedented numbers. Reuters reported that as many as 8,000 people dressed in black took part in one protest along the promenade in Alexandria, Said's hometown" (Eltahawy 2010, para. 13). The page, which "served as a rallying point for protesters" (Tapscott, 2011, para. 4), had more than 100,000 friends [within weeks and]…eventually grew to more than half a million" (Tapscott, 2011, para. 4).

Police brutality wasn't the only injustice protested in Egypt. The three-decade-long president of the country was ousted from office after several protests against his rule. "The social media tools gave Mubarak's opponents unprecedented ability to share information and organize their activities, including the massive protests which riveted the world's attention" (Tapscott, 2011, para. 2).

"As hundreds of thousands of Egyptians in Cairo's Tahrir Square celebrated the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak on 11 February, some…wielded signs proclaiming, 'Thank you, Facebook'" (Harsch, 2011, para. 1).

In Tunisia, a similar movement had just occurred.

In December 2010 a young but jobless university graduate in a small Tunisian town set himself on fire. His desperate act quickly set off street protests. Videos of the actions were shared across the Internet and were broadcast by the satellite TV network Al-Jazeera (Harsch, 2011, para. 6).

Bouazizi's suicide "tragically brought to light many of the longstanding problems Tunisia's youth now face: government cronyism, corruption, restriction of civil rights, and an unemployment rate as high as 30 percent" (Wambugu, 2011, para. 3). With these problems on their mind, "angry Tunisians used Twitter to organize their protests and inform the outside world of their activities" (Tapscott, 2011, para. 5).

These protests, which "were largely organized by apparently leaderless online activists…asked people to stand up, showing the world that they are not a cowardly, submissive people" (Wambugu, 2011, para. 8). The protesting "grew ever larger, until they forced President el-Abidine Ben Ali to flee the country on 14 January" (Harsch, 2011, para. 6). Through the power of collaboration, another president was toppled.

In addition to generating shared awareness and collective strength, Facebook and Twitter have delivered increased visibility to the world. "'Twitter is 'the first people's broadcast medium,''" said Douglas Rushkoff, author and media theorist (Morozov, 2011, para. 7). "While television networks in the United States featured experts opining on why the Libyan government would be able to quickly quell the protests, activists were circulating rough videos of assaults on heavily fortified military establishments in eastern Libya" (Hultman, 2011, para. 2).

"Reports by eyewitnesses via social media have been consistently ahead of established news media in documenting the spread of anti-government rebellion across Libya" (Hultman, 2011, para. 5). Anti-government "activists have been using mobile phones to call, send photos and video and updates via Twitter to contacts in Europe and North America" (Hultman, 2011, para. 4).

A journalist from the UK's *The Guardian* (2011) challenged his readers to "think of the defining image of the uprisings in the Middle East, …the idea that unites Egypt with Tunisia, Bahrain and Libya" (para. 1). In the article, he writes,

> It has not been, in itself, the celebrations of Hosni Mubarak's fall nor the battles in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Nor even the fact of Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation in the central Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, which acted as a trigger for all events that have unfolded. Instead, that defining image is this: a young woman or a young man with a smartphone (para. 1-2).

Pressures to Authoritarian Governments from Facebook and Twitter

The power of Facebook and Twitter certainly present a threat to authoritarian governments.

> For many years political violence and upheavals, nuclear proliferation and international terrorism have posed the biggest threats to the nation state. We are now in an era in which the Internet has been added to that arsenal, where millions of fingers plucking and poking at touch screen phones, logging in, posting and meeting up can bring down a government, as they did in Egypt (Courtemanche, 2011, para. 10).

> "'I've always said that if you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet,'" said

Wael Ghonim, a Google executive and the administrator of the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said" (Ghannam, 2011, para. 7).

After many years of built-up repression, people, equipped with social media tools, have begun to stand up for themselves and their rights. These tools "provide a two-way conversation unlike the mainstream media…making it much easier to mobilize a group" (Wafula, 2011, para. 7).

While Facebook and Twitter have made it easier to assemble activists, they have made it harder for authoritarian governments to steer the public.

> Dictators keep a firm grip on the country's media to suppress criticism. This used to be relatively simple. Take control of the television station and newspapers and you control the public's knowledge and thus behavior. But the Internet is interactive and decentralized. Its model is to share information from many people to many people. As

such, it has an awesome neutrality. It will be what we want it to be, and in Egypt young people wanted it to be a tool to bring down a tyrant (Tapscott, 2011, para. 7-8).

Finally, civilians have found their voice, and they're certainly using it. "Few can deny that social media has enabled the most significant advance in freedom of expression and association in contemporary Arab history" (Ghannam, 2011, para. 10).

First was Tunisia. "The swift and unexpected overthrow of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's 23-year-old regime in Tunisia and the mass unrest in Egypt have sparked debate on how far social media networks can challenge governments around the world" (Wambugu, 2011, para. 7).

Soon after, Egypt followed suit. "Inspired [by Tunisia], Egyptian activists called protests against their own government on 25 January. …The protests mushroomed across the country" (Harsch, 2011, para. 7).

"Hosni Mubarak's departure from power after three decades of rule showed that the power of social media sites and mobile phone technology proved a far bigger threat to the former Egyptian president" (Ghannam, 2011, para. 2).

Now that the world has seen the strength of social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, when used by angry, disgruntled civilians, many are left wondering who will be next.

> While the endgame has been reached in Egypt, we await the denouement of events elsewhere. Whatever eventually happens, the role the Internet plays in holding governments to account has become clear. …Recent protests for democracy, organized through social media, pose a direct threat to autocratic regimes (Courtemanche, 2011, para. 8).

So far, several countries seem to have been influenced. "The success of the popular movements in toppling the autocratic governments of Egypt and Tunisia encouraged young activists. …In Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Iran, Bahrain, Morocco and elsewhere they called marches and rallies" (Harsch, 2011, para. 4).

Indeed, if the pen—or the click—is mightier than the sword, then social media and mobile technology represent a new and welcome way forward in the Middle East. It's uncertain where these revolutions will lead, but if millions of Arabs have anything to say about it, we'll be certain to hear of it online (Ghannam, 2011, para. 25).

Authoritarian Government Intervention to Discourage the Use of Facebook and Twitter

It is no surprise that authoritarian governments in the Middle East have tried to restrict Internet freedom. "Arab leaders have long recognized the threat posed by the Internet, and most have instituted filters and legal restrictions in attempts to control online activities" (Ghannam, 2011, para. 16).

In 2009, during the first "Twitter Revolution," Iran was the first to shut down the Internet. "Mindful of the Iran precedent" (Joudeh, 2011, para. 2), "in Egypt, …President Hosni Mubarak's government tried to stifle the protests by shutting off the Internet. It didn't work— indeed, some suspect this move brought more people onto the streets" (Apps, 2011, para. 13).

By cutting off Egypt's internet and wireless communication in the face of huge protests, President Hosni Mubarak betrayed his own fear—that Facebook, Twitter, laptops and smartphones could empower his opponent, expose his weakness to the world and topple his regime (Wambugu, 2011, para. 11).

Coincidentally, once demonstrations in Libya started up, "Internet access and cellphone service…has severely deteriorated—the work, many suspect, of the government, since Colonel Qaddafi's son Muhammad runs the country's satellite and cellphone communications companies" (Gonzales & Harting, 2011, para. 4).

Shutting down the Internet backfired on these governments.

The government's action was seen as an integrity violation. E-commerce shut down. Mothers couldn't diagnose their sick children. People everywhere were negatively affected and anger was focused on the government. Moreover, when people have their tools of communication taken away, such as Twitter and Facebook, they have no choice but to come into the street and communicate. So this had the effect of stimulating the mass action in the street (Tapscott, 2011, para. 14-15).

Civilians were forced to get creative. If they wanted to communicate, they had to find ways to evade the government.

> For the first time on such a scale, technology-minded protesters quickly began devising methods for circumventing the obstacles erected by the Egyptian government. Social network user 'status updates' such as this one—public guidance for the protesters—began cropping up on sites: 'OUR DSL IS STILL WORKING IN EGYPT USING DIAL UP 0777 7776 or 07777 66 Share with every one asap #Egypt #25Ja.' Such messages provided instructions on how to dial up a phone number to connect to the Internet and bypass government controls (Joudeh, 2011, para. 3-4).

Even on the streets in clear sight, people were continuing to collaborate, using methods other than social media to unite. "Social media was replaced by…the analogue equivalent of Twitter: handheld signs held aloft at demonstrations saying where and when people should gather the next day" (Beaumont, 2011, para. 26).

And soon, civilians received a helping hand.

> When the last Internet operator in the country was ordered to shut down all service [in Egypt], Google and Twitter joined together to establish three mobile phone numbers…for people to call and record their tweets as a voice message. Users were instructed to log on to Twitter to listen to tweets rather than read them. The new 'audio tweets' instantly gave this content a more personal feel as users could hear the voice of the tweeter and surrounding background sounds. It was the first time that leading Internet search engines and social media combined forces amid widespread upheaval to keep information flowing despite state efforts to shape the public narrative (Joudeh, 2011, para. 7).

Google's blog referred to this project as "'some weekend work that will (hopefully) enable more Egyptians to be heard'" ("The new weapon against repression: social media," 2011, para. 9).

United States Intervention to Maintain Access to Facebook and Twitter

Unquestionably, "support for the uprising in Egypt had crossed borders" (Hauser, 2011, para. 10). However, it wasn't just support for Egypt; it was support for Internet freedom around the world.

Soon, other Middle Eastern countries needed help. Once Libya's Internet was impaired, the United States government stepped in.

> By ensuring that Libyans maintain access to these basic services, the United States and the rest of the world would not only assist in the overthrow of Colonel Qaddafi, but they would also send a strong message of support to those elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa fighting for their voices to be heard (Gonzales & Harting, 2011, para. 14).

Well aware of the power of social media, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton cautioned "a group of US ambassadors [that]…'social media is going to change things'" (Alsan, 2011, para. 1).

> In a speech in February 2011, Clinton
>
> warned repressive governments not to restrict Internet freedom, saying such efforts will ultimately fail. She said the US was committed to global Internet freedom, in her first major address since the Egyptian uprising. …"This is a foreign policy priority, one that will only increase in importance in the coming years," Mrs. Clinton said. In what is being hailed as a major policy speech, Mrs. Clinton announced that the US government would invest an additional $25m to help online dissidents and digital activists fight state repression ("Hillary Clinton: Internet repression 'will fail,'" 2011, para. 1-2 & 4-5).

Money wasn't the only contribution from the United States. The country also promised to set up Twitter accounts in Chinese, Russian and Hindi after already establishing French, Spanish, Arabic and Farsi accounts ("Hillary Clinton: Internet repression 'will fail,'" 2011, para. 8).

The US State Departments first tweet on their constructed Farsi account, USAdarFarsi, said it all: "'US State Dept recognizes historic role of social media among Iranians. We want to join in your conversations'" (Aslan, 2011, para. 2).

Chapter III: Methodology

This was a descriptive qualitative research study to illustrate the power of collaboration through social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, to impact political unrest in the Middle East. Employing literature that affirms, "social media has enabled the most significant advance in freedom of expression and association in contemporary Arab history" (Ghannam, 2011, para. 10), this study explores the capacity of Facebook and Twitter through the practice of working subject matter specialists.

Qualitative Research as a Research Method

In order to examine the relationship between social media and political change in the Middle East, this study, which is descriptive in nature, takes a qualitative approach. The purpose of a descriptive study is "to document and describe the phenomenon of interest" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 33). The four characteristics of qualitative research are: that it takes place in the natural world, uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, is emergent rather than tightly prefigured and is fundamentally interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 3). This study's purpose is to document and describe, and it encompasses all four of the characteristics of qualitative research; therefore, descriptive qualitative research seems appropriate. This type of research was conducted through interviews with working professionals.

Data Sources

The sources of data for this study were three subject matter specialists. The first is an Emmy Award-winning television journalist turned conservative radio talk show host from the San Francisco Bay Area. The second is a professor at California Polytechnic State University, teaching classes about the modern Middle East. In addition to having knowledge about the Middle East, the second specialist has also lived in the Middle East, getting her B.A. degree from

the National University of Iran in Tehran. The third subject matter specialist is the President of

the Atascadero Democratic Club and an active community member in California's Central Coast.

The following questions made up the data for this study. Each subject matter specialist

was asked these questions and probes:

1. Are you more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media?

    a. If no, a reminder to the respondent that the news media has used social media to

        report on the Middle East.

        i. Probe by asking the question again, with this reminder.

    b. If yes, how so?

2. Do you believe Facebook and Twitter have helped lead to political change?

    a. If no, a reminder to the respondent that social media has provided shared

        awareness of Middle Eastern civilians, shown the collective strength of the crowd

        through assembled activists and organized protests, and has produced increased

        visibility to the rest of the world.

        i. Probe by asking the question again, with this reminder.

    b. If yes, how has this political change affected you?

3. Should authoritarian governments in the Middle East be threatened by Facebook and

    Twitter?

    a. If yes/no, why/why not?

4. In general, did Internet shutdowns in the Middle East encourage or discourage civilians to

    use Facebook and Twitter?

    a. If discouraged, why?

    b. If encouraged, please provide an example.

5. Should the United States have gotten involved in the situation in the Middle East by

    helping repressive countries gain access to social media?

        a. If yes/no, why/why not?

Data Collection

Qualitative research is often dependent on in-depth interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108). Utilizing interviews with three subject matter specialists, the study reveals the respondents' views on the phenomenon in the Middle East. It is the respondents' views that are important; they were not influenced by the researcher. "The participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108).

There are several reasons to use interviews as a tool to collect data: "an interview is a useful way to get large amounts of data quickly" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108), "immediate follow-up and clarification are possible" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 109), and "interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that people hold for their everyday activities" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 109).

There are also downsides to interviewing, which consist of the following: "interviewees may be unwilling or may be uncomfortable sharing all that the interviewer hopes to explore" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 109), "the interviewer may not ask questions that evoke long narratives from participants" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 109), and "interviewees may have good reason not to be truthful" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 109).

Data Presentations

Both field notes and the use of a tape recorder were used to collect data from the three interviews. The field notes provided a record of expressions and non-verbal responses, while the tape recorder was used to document all verbal interaction and answers to the interview questions.

Considering verbatim notes often consume too much time and may result in incomplete or lost data (McMillan, 2001, p. 271), field notes were preferred. And since a tape recorder assists the interviewer with collecting a complete, objective record of the interview (McMillan, 2001, p. 271), the researcher taped all three interviews and using the tape, created verbatim transcripts, later utilizing the transcripts and field notes for analysis.

Data Analysis

"Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). Strauss and Corbin describe qualitative data analysis as "a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory" (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150).

In order to bring order, structure and interpretation to the collected data, the researcher systematically organized the data by coding it into categories and constructing matrixes. After classifying the data, the researcher compared and contrasted it to information retrieved from the literature review.

Delimitations

This study utilizes opinions provided by three subject matter specialists. These beliefs are not guaranteed to represent the public's opinion on the role of social media in bringing about revolutionary political change in the Middle East.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis

Description of Participating Respondents

The three respondents selected for this study were all subject matter specialists because of their career, background or pastime. An e-mail was sent to all three specialists requesting their participation in the study in the form of a face-to-face audio-recorded interview. Two of the respondents were able to participate in a face-to-face audio-recorded interview, while one respondent participated in an audio-recorded phone interview.

Brian Sussman, who participated in an audio-recorded phone interview, began his career in broadcasting while attending the University of Missouri. Upon graduation, he became the nation's youngest television News Director (Sussman, 2011). Realizing his passion for weather and the environment, he went back to school for post-graduate studies in meteorology and embarked on his 20-year career in television as a weatherman, mostly in the San Francisco Bay Area. During that time, he received multiple Emmy Awards, Associated Press Awards and Radio and Television News Director's trophies (Sussman, 2011). In 2001, he went back to radio and began working part-time at San Francisco's KSFO, one of the top conservative talk stations in America. In 2002, he got an evening show at the station and switched to mornings in 2010, taking over for the esteemed Lee Rodgers (Sussman, 2011). He has also started several successful small businesses and a non-profit called "Brian's Kids."

Lee Perkins received her undergraduate in history from the State University of New York system. Afterwards, she moved to the West Coast to get a Master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from California Polytechnic State University. She liked Cal Poly so much that she began working there and eventually retired from the university, where she worked for the International Education and Programs Department, in 2005. She is now very involved in her

community, taking the role of president for the Atascadero Democratic Club. Her hobbies include being an activist, gardening, swimming, camping and traveling.

Manzar Foroohar has been a history professor at California Polytechnic State University for 24 years, specializing in Middle East history. Previously, she taught at Tehran University in Iran and UCSD in California (CSU East Bay, 201, p. 2). She received her Ph.D. in history from UCLA. Born and raised in Iran, she has a heart for the Middle East and has produced several articles and presentations on the situation in Palestine and justice in the Middle East (CSU East Bay, 2011, p. 2). She travels to the Middle East regularly.

Awareness of the Power of Social Media in the Middle East

Respondents were asked to discuss their awareness of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media, stance on the role of Facebook and Twitter in these events, opinion on the threat of these social media tools, thoughts on the results of Internet shutdowns and outlook on United States involvement in the Middle East. In addition, they were asked how the political change in the Middle East has affected them personally. And lastly, they were asked to give examples to further explain their thought processes.

Each respondent was asked the following questions in an audio-recorded face-to-face or phone interview, and a summary of responses to the interview questions provided the following data:

1. **Are you more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media?**

Question #1 gauged the respondents' awareness of the impact of social media in the Middle East. If they were aware of the significance of social media in this situation, they were asked how social media brought about this knowledge.

Question #1 elicited the following responses: Brian stated that social media really hasn't helped him personally, but that for many of his colleagues, "Facebook, for example, has been an excellent way to participate in instant communication. …You're getting instant communication, instant feedback from multiple sources on the ground, and it really helps to craft the story nicely." Lee said that social media has definitely made her more aware. While she isn't a user, she learned about the events through the main media, who utilized social media, and saw "how it was used in Egypt. It was amazing. …I think what brought it together is the ability to text and the social media that exists there. And once people find they have a voice, it makes all the difference." Manzar didn't think social media had helped her become more aware and stated, "I've always been aware of the events in the Middle East. …One of my main source of news of the Middle East are academic books [and] academic scholar journals."

2. **Do you believe Facebook and Twitter have helped lead to political change?**

Question #2 asked the respondents' their stance on the role of Facebook and Twitter in producing political change in the Middle East.

Question #2 elicited the following responses: Brian's thoughts were, "Yes, without a question, they have." Lee had a similar reply. She agreed that Facebook and Twitter had helped lead to political change, stating, "I think they're a tool that's been used. And in Egypt, it worked very effectively." However, she added, "Social media has its limits. It can get people out to the street, but if the military were to turn against the people, I'm not sure what would happen." Manzar had different thoughts on the subject. Denying that Facebook and Twitter had helped lead to political change, she believed that "people make political changes. If you look at the situation in Tunisia or Egypt today, it was the people who went into the street. It was not the Facebook."

3. Should authoritarian governments in the Middle East be threatened by Facebook and Twitter?

Question #3 solicited the respondents' opinion on whether or not authoritarian governments in the Middle East should be threatened by the socially powerful Facebook and Twitter. Subsequently, the respondents were asked to explain their opinion.

Question #3 elicited the following responses: Brian answered, "They should. They really should. And that's why, you know, you're seeing, for example, certain countries not allowing those entities to exist—because they're threatening." Believing that Facebook and Twitter "gives people some sense of anonymity to communicate with one another, …allows people to be able to communicate with people they would never get a chance to communicate, … [and is a place] where you can really reach a lot of people in one particular time," he said that if one uses it properly, one can "really leverage that to change opinions." Lee was convinced that these governments already were threatened and replied, "Well, I think they are. I don't think there's any question about it. That's why it was shut down." Explaining her reasoning, she remarked that Facebook and Twitter are "tool[s] to organize, and it's so instant and people are attuned to it. …It hits all ages, all ages and social economic groups." Manzar also agreed that governments should be threatened because "just like any other dictatorship all over the world, the way they rule is keeping people uninformed, and social media is breaking that breech for the people. It's connect people together and facilitating the dissemination of information."

4. In general, did Internet shutdowns in the Middle East encourage or discourage civilians to use Facebook and Twitter?

Question #4 asked respondents their thoughts on the result and consequences of Internet shutdowns done by the government in the Middle East—whether it encouraged or discouraged civilians to continue fighting for freedom.

Question #4 elicited the following responses: After noting that "totalitarian, authoritarian, dictatorial governments can be very, very intimidating because people know the consequences," Brian said, "Nonetheless, there's this other thing inside each of us—we all desire freedom. We all want to live freely; we love liberty deep down in our hearts. So with that in mind, there's some who are going to come to Facebook and Twitter…and say, 'To heck with it, I've got to do this. This is for the better of the people.'" Instead of discouraging civilians, Brian believed that "it just emboldens a citizenry when they see the government act in these particular ways." Lee responded by saying that it neither encouraged nor discouraged. She explained her opinion by stating, "Well [in Egypt], they're already out on the street, so they just stay there. …But if you compare Iran, the enforcement was so brutal that people were forced to leave the streets, regardless of what message." Manzar didn't think the Internet shutdowns had impact on civilians because "people were already on the street. …It's not that they went to the street to defend the Internet; they were already in the street."

5. Should the United States have gotten involved in the situation in the Middle East by helping repressive countries gain access to social media?

Question #5 acquired the respondents' outlook on whether or not it was right that the United States helped Middle Eastern countries gain access to social media.

Question #5 elicited the following responses: Brian, who said, "Allowing all these countries to have access to these wonderful platforms is huge," believed that the US should help people in the Middle East gain that freedom. He stated that people look to the United States for help with all sorts of things, including technology, and declared that "if the [US] government can open doors for this technology to be used, especially to allow people to communicate and perhaps encourage them to bring about change in their countries that will really be changes involving liberty and freedom, I think it's a good thing because that's really what the United States is supposed to be all about." Lee thought it was good to support "a country that is standing up for democracy and health care and job and education [because] that's what we're about," but didn't think the United States should get directly involved by telling the repressive governments what to do. Manzar did not think that the United States should get involved at all. In fact, she said, "One of the major reasons that we have so many dictators in the Middle East is because United States has been helping them." Seemingly frustrated, she declared, "So if United States wants to help Middle Eastern people, is just to stay out of it. …It's none of our business. We're not the police of the Middle East or the world."

Social Media: The Power of Collaboration

Research question #1: Has social media changed the way we experience events?

Many, including blogger Zerlina Maxwell, believe it has. Although she was in New Jersey when events were unfolding in Egypt, because of social media, she felt like she was able to experience them as if she was there (Bortot, 2011, para. 2).

People in the United States weren't the only ones turning to social media for information regarding the Middle East. After January 25, 2011, social media-using Egyptians living in Cairo preferred Twitter rather than official news sources for information and updates (Media Republic, 2011, para. 1).

Research question #1 was addressed to discover whether the respondents utilized social media and consequently, how using social media had changed the way they experienced events. Each respondent was asked if he/she was more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media; and if so, they were asked to explain how they were more aware (see Table 1).

Table 1

Awareness of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media, by Respondent

Respondent	Answer
Brian Sussman	Has not helped him become more aware personally, but has seen how it, especially Facebook, has helped others because of instant communication and feedback
Lee Perkins	Has helped her become more aware through the main news media, which utilized social media
Manzar Foroohar	Has not helped her become more aware; uses academic books and scholar journals instead

Table 1 shows that Lee was the only respondent who was personally more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media. Brian responded that he wasn't, but that he saw and understood that many were, noting that Facebook is "an excellent way to participate in instant communication." Manzar stated that social media had not helped her at all and that instead, she relied on other sources for information regarding the Middle East.

Research question #2: What makes Facebook and Twitter so powerful and how does it lead to political change?

Facebook and Twitter have led to shared awareness (Crovitz, 2011, para. 7), collective strength of the crowd where young activists used social media to spread demands, assemble demonstrations and collect support (Harsch, 2011, para. 2), and increased visibility as civilians found the people's first broadcast medium (Morozov, 2011, para. 7).

Research question #2 was addressed to understand how these mediums became so powerful and how people employed them to produce an unprecedented political change in the Middle East. Each respondent was asked if they thought Facebook and Twitter had helped lead to political change (see Table 2).

Table 2

Political change in the Middle East produced by Facebook and Twitter, by Respondents

Respondent	Answer
Brian Sussman	Yes, without a question, Facebook and Twitter have helped lead to political change
Lee Perkins	Yes, Facebook and Twitter have been tools that have been used very effectively, especially in Egypt
Manzar Foroohar	No, Facebook and Twitter have not helped lead to political change; instead, it's the people in the streets who have

As seen in Table 2, both Brian and Lee agreed that Facebook and Twitter have helped lead to political change. Manzar disagreed, saying that it's people who make political change and go out on the street, not social media.

Research question #3: Are authoritarian governments in the Middle East threatened by Facebook and Twitter?

It has been proven that millions of people using the Internet are strong enough to topple a government (Courtemanche, 2011, para. 10). And while authoritarian governments have, for

years, been successful at controlling threats and suppressing criticism, they no longer have that

ability (Tapscott, 2011, para. 7-8).

Research question #3 was addressed to determine the threat of Facebook and Twitter to

authoritarian governments in the Middle East. Each respondent was asked if those governments

should be intimidated by these mediums; and if so, why these mediums elicit those fears (see

Table 3).

Table 3

Threat to authoritarian governments in the Middle East produced by Facebook and Twitter, by Respondents

Respondent	Answer
Brian Sussman	They really should be threatened because if used properly, Facebook and Twitter can be leveraged to change opinions
Lee Perkins	They already are threatened because Facebook and Twitter are instant tools used to organize that people of all ages and social economic groups are attuned to
Manzar Foroohar	They should be threatened because dictatorships rule by keeping people uninformed; social media breaks the breach and connects people, facilitating the dissemination of information

Table 3 reveals that all respondents thought that the authoritarian governments in the

Middle East should be, or already are, threatened by Facebook and Twitter. Brian and Lee both

came to this conclusion because the mediums are powerful tools to organize, leverage opinions

and bring about change. Manzar found the mediums threatening because it prevented the

dictatorships from keeping people unknowledgeable.

Research question #4: Do Internet shutdowns encourage or discourage civilians to use

Facebook and Twitter?

When the freedom of communication is seized from civilians, they are forced to go to the street to communicate, which brought masses of people onto the street—much more than there were before the government violated the public's right (Tapscott, 2011, para. 14-15). Social media was soon replaced by handheld signs carried high at demonstrations telling people where and when the next protest would be (Beaumont, 2011, para. 26).

Research question #4 was addressed to decipher the outcome of the government decision to shut down the Internet, a tremendous tool in the fight for democracy. Each respondent was asked if Internet shutdowns encouraged or discouraged civilians to use Facebook and Twitter (see Table 4).

Table 4

Outcome of Internet shutdowns mandated by Middle Eastern governments, by Respondents

Respondent	Answer
Brian Sussman	Although many are intimidated by authoritarian governments because they know the consequences, we all love liberty and want to live freely, so some will decide to take a risk for the better of the people; the governments' unjust actions emboldens the citizenry
Lee Perkins	Internet shutdowns neither encourage nor discourage; people are already out on the street, so they just stay there, or like in Iran, the enforcement is so brutal that the people are forced to leave, regardless of what message
Manzar Foroohar	Internet shutdowns had no impact on civilians; they didn't go to the street to defend the Internet

Table 4 highlights that each of the respondents' answers was different. Brian argued that the Internet shutdowns encouraged civilians to fight for what they believed in. Lee thought it neither encouraged nor discouraged—that there were lots of people out on the street, but that if

there was a violent threat, they would leave for their own safety and forget about the desired freedom. Manzar said that the Internet shutdowns had no impact, and that people would have been on the street regardless because they didn't go there to defend the Internet in the first place.

Research question #5: Why did the United States get involved by helping these repressive countries gain access to social media?

In 2011, the United States sent a powerful message to the Middle East that they would support them, helping their voices to be heard (Gonzales & Harting, 2011, para. 14). In an acclaimed major policy speech, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the United States was determined to produce global Internet freedom ("Hillary Clinton: Internet repression 'will fail,'" 2011, para. 1-2 & 4-5).

Research question #5 was addressed to comprehend the reasons for the United States to get involved in the situation in the Middle East. Each respondent was asked if the US should have gotten involved by helping repressive countries gain access to social media (see Table 5).

Table 5

United States involvement in Internet freedom for the Middle East, by Respondents

Respondent	Answer
Brian Sussman	If the US can help people communicate and bring about changes involving liberty and freedom, it's a good thing because that's what the US is supposed to be all about
Lee Perkins	It's good to support a country that's standing up for democracy, health care, jobs and education because that's what the US is all about
Manzar Foroohar	The US should not get involved at all; if the US wants to help Middle Eastern people, stay out of it—we're not the police of the Middle East or the world

Table 5 exhibits Brian and Lee's very similar responses. Both said that considering the United States is founded on democracy and freedom, the influential country should help others gain those sought-after privileges. Manzar, on the other hand, strongly discouraged US involvement in the Middle East. She remarked that if the United States wanted to help, they should just stay out of it because it's not their business.

Chapter V: Discussion of Findings

Summary

In light of the repressiveness that abounds in the Middle East, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter have provided oppressed civilians-turned-activists a powerful, unprecedented voice. In an attempt to obtain democracy, people in the Middle East have turned to collaboration in order to create change in politically stagnant societies. This collaboration was achieved through shared awareness, the collective strength of the crowd and increased visibility to the world.

According to Java (2007), "an important component in understanding influence is to detect sentiment and opinions" (p. 1934). After detecting common feelings and shared awareness, "young people armed with little more than laptops and mobile phones can help amplify popular voices for freedom and justice" (Harsch, 2011, para. 9).

Displaying the collective strength of the crowd, "activists in Egypt, as in nearby Tunisia and elsewhere in the region, were able to use their access to new social media tools to publicize demands, call demonstrations and win support from broader sectors of the population" (Harsch, 2011, para. 2).

These passionate approaches brought about increased visibility to the rest of the world as "activists were circulating rough videos of assaults on heavily fortified military establishments in eastern Libya" (Hultman, 2011, para. 2) and eyewitnesses in the Middle East were "documenting the spread of anti-government rebellion" (Hultman, 2011, para. 5) "using mobile phones to call, send photos and video and updates via Twitter to contacts in Europe and North America" (Hultman, 2011, para. 4).

The following five research questions guided the study:

1. Research question #1: Has social media changed the way we experience events?

2. Research question #2: What makes Facebook and Twitter so powerful and how does it lead to political change?

3. Research question #3: Are authoritarian governments in the Middle East threatened by Facebook and Twitter?

4. Research question #4: Do Internet shutdowns encourage or discourage civilians to use Facebook and Twitter?

5. Research question #5: Why did the United States get involved by helping these repressive countries gain access to social media?

In order to investigate the relationship between social media and political change in the Middle East, this study, which is descriptive in nature, took a qualitative approach. This type of research was conducted through interviews with three subject matter specialists.

Conclusions

By examining the data from this descriptive, qualitative study in order to analyze the relationship between social media and political change in the Middle East, the researcher was able to conclude the following regarding the five research questions:

1. **Research question #1: Has social media changed the way we experience events?**
   All three specialists had different answers. One said social media had changed her experience, making her more aware. Another said social media hadn't helped him personally become more aware but understood how it had helped others. The last respondent didn't believe social media had changed her experience since she relied on other information channels instead.

2. **Research question #2: What makes Facebook and Twitter so powerful and how does it lead to political change?**

Two of the three specialists observed that Facebook and Twitter had helped lead to political change. The other specialist did not agree, stating that people in the streets lead to political change, rather than social media.

3. **Research question #3: Are authoritarian governments in the Middle East threatened by Facebook and Twitter?**

All three specialists thought that the governments in the Middle East should be threatened or are already threatened by Facebook and Twitter. Reasons for this included the fact that these social media sites are used to leverage opinions, are instant tools able to organize all sorts of people and are facilitating the dissemination of information.

4. **Research question #4: Do Internet shutdowns encourage or discourage civilians to use Facebook and Twitter?**

All three specialists had different opinions. One argued that Internet shutdowns encouraged civilians to fight for their rights. Another thought it neither encouraged nor discouraged, considering there were already a lot of people on the street. The last respondent said the shutdowns had no impact because people would have been on the street regardless.

5. **Research question #5: Why did the United States get involved by helping these repressive countries gain access to social media?**

Two of the three specialists said the United States got involved because as a country founded on liberty and freedom, it should help other countries gain these privileges. The other respondent did not think the United States should have gotten involved and would, instead, better aid the Middle East if it would just stay out of it.

Recommendations

Further research should focus on other aspects of collaboration in the Middle East as follows:

1. Research should include other social media activities, such as blogs or YouTube. Further research on these vast platforms may produce additional information regarding the collaboration of social media.

2. Research should expand to other countries, especially in the Middle East. Further research in the Middle East may provide a different perspective on the use of social media to generate political change.

3. Research should investigate additional ways social media sites were utilized to produce political change. This may further explain whether or not political change would have happened in the Middle East if it weren't for social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

This study supports the literature that demonstrates the power of collaboration to produce political change in the Middle East. As the literature indicates, Facebook and Twitter were critical tools used to bring about a revolutionary governmental transformation in countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. These social media sites were "empowering people to become the new influencers" (Breakenridge & Solis, 2009, p. xvii).

Many believe that without the social media coverage of Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian man who set himself on fire, or Khaled Said, the Egyptian man who was killed in a brutal beating, these groundbreaking changes would have never happened, or at least wouldn't have happened so swiftly.

These devastating deaths stirred the people of the Middle East. Serving "as a rallying point for protesters" in Egypt (Tapscott, 2011, para. 4) and prompting "angry Tunisians [who]

used Twitter to organize their protests and inform the outside world of their activities (Tapscott, 2011, para. 5), the authoritarian presidents in both countries were overthrown.

Of course, this presented an enormous threat to other similar governments in the Middle East. And because of this, many were inspired. According to Harsch (2011), "in Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Iran, Bahrain, Morocco and elsewhere they called marches and rallies" (para. 4).

In an attempt to stop the power of social media, oppressive governments ordered shutdowns of the Internet. And in response, the United States fought for global Internet freedom.

Regardless of these efforts to control and with a little help, social media prevailed. Ghannam (2011) summed it up perfectly: "Few can deny that social media has enabled the most significant advance in freedom of expression and association in contemporary Arab history" (para. 10).

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APPENDIX A

Interview: Brian Sussman

The following interview is part of a descriptive qualitative research study conducted to illustrate the power of collaboration through social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, to impact political unrest in the Middle East.

Interviewer: Sarah Goodman

Respondent: Brian Sussman

Date of Interview: 5/11/11

Opening Comments:

1.   Interviewer: "Could you please give me a brief intro or bio about yourself?"

Respondent: "I began my broadcasting career at a small radio station in Columbia, Missouri, and uh, moved from there to television and decided that I really liked television weather and went back to school to get my meteorological credentials. I ended up having a 20-year career in television, mostly in the San Francisco Bay Area. And in 2001, I decided that I wanted to get back into radio, so I was able to get a part-time job at KSFO, which is one of the top conservative talk stations in America, and got an evening show in 2002 and then came to mornings in 2010. The other thing that I think is notable, besides the media career—I've also had some businesses that I've started, and also have had a nonprofit, which is in a transformation stage right now. It's called Brian's Kids. We would help kids get out of foster care and into adopted homes. And now we're re-doing Brian's Kids to uh, to use it as a uh, to help raise money for kids in foster care to go to college. So, that's the runs, hits and errors of my life."

2.   Interviewer: "Are you more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of

social media?"

Respondent: "Um, I…in terms of the Middle Eastern situation and what I know of

the Middle East, social media really hasn't helped me. However, what I hear from many

of my colleagues who are from the Middle East, uh, particularly from Iran, will very well

be used social mediums, for example, uh, social media product like Facebook, for

example, has been an excellent way to participate in instant communication as well as e-

mail. But it seems as if people in these particular countries have, I'm thinking, Iran in

particular—I also know people that are able to facebook friends in Egypt when all the

troubles broke out in North Africa. So, um, I know that those particular platforms have

been very useful to people involved in these struggles and uh, who are participating in

various levels of demonstration. But as simply involved in the news media, I don't get

too much information through those channels."

    a.   Interviewer: "How do you think the people you were talking about have

become more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media?"

Respondent: "It's pretty incredible because the instant

communication…uh, you know, they're able to, for example, when there's uh,

well, in the news business, we got essentially a 24-hour news cycle. So, first of

all, a story has to be…you have to have a reporter on the ground observing

something. And then that reporter has to file a story that would either mean

writing the story, which is going to take a little time, or if it's a news report,

producing the story—that's going to take a little time. Even if it's a live news

report, um, it's not maybe as instantaneous as people think. And so, once that is

blasted out to the public via traditional media channels, then it takes time to

process it. People have to hear it, and there's work involved. You've go to,

you've to go to the website and read the story. You've got to go to the television

and look at the video or maybe go online and watch the video. So it takes about

24 hours for that story that takes place this morning to really get consumed and

uh, and processed by the population. So that's the traditional news media—it's a

24-hour news cycle. But with social media, everything is instant. You're getting

instant communication, instant feedback from multiple sources on the ground, and

it really helps to craft the story nicely, in terms of being able to hear from uh, a

bunch of eyewitnesses who are speaking to you unfiltered. But the only problem

with that is um, you can get a lot of misinformation, so you have to be careful to

vent the information. A good news organization hopefully isn't going to write a

story and publish it or put it on that television news report without doing a lot of

back-checking. So hopefully, by the time you hear or see or listen to a formal

traditional news report, there's been an effort to reinvent the material to make sure

this is the best stuff at this particular time. We know at this point in time that

everything we're telling is accurate. So with social media, you don't know about

whose saying what. You can have somebody whose uh, you know, their point of,

their point of view is very narrow, so they're not seeing the whole picture. You

can have somebody using the social media for merely propaganda purposes and

putting up misinformation purposely. You can get somebody whose

exaggerating. So while social media is really great and it does give us some

texture to the story, again you have to be careful because we don't always know

whose saying what on the other end."

3. Interviewer: "Do you believe Facebook and Twitter have helped lead to political

change?

Respondent: "Yes, without question, they have. Um, and uh, this is, on the one

hand, this is very exciting. Uh, on the other end, it's a bit disconcerting. It's exciting

because people are getting involved in the process, uh, the electoral process, in the United

States of America who might not otherwise be involved. The Obama administration

utilized Facebook and Twitter in a masterful way. I mean, they just had it dialed. And

the Republicans are still…we are still trying to get our arms around that medium. Now

why were the Democrats so successful? Well, because you know, a lot of the creators for

these mediums are very, very um, are political activists who vote democrat. Look no

further than, for example, Facebook, where you had Barack Obama in the San Francisco

Bay Area just a couple months ago. And who did he dine with? He dines with the

founder of Facebook. You look at, for example, Google. I mean, uh, Sergey Brin and

Larry Paige are best buddies with Barack Obama. You can also look at the people who

have founded Twitter. I mean, they're in this, all in this same particular camp. So,

certainly, they're more able and more capable and more willing to share their technology

with entities that um, that they want to see become victorious. So in those particular

channels that you just mentioned, those platforms, Twitter and Facebook, have been just

awesome tools for the Democrat party, specifically. The only bad thing about that is—

again, you're not getting complete stories. When you look at, for example, how a lot of

people now get their news, there was a time in America where there were two

newspapers—and this is only going back 30 years—there were two newspapers in every

city—a morning newspaper and an evening newspaper. The evening newspaper had all

updated stories compared to the morning newspaper. And people would literally sit

down every morning, and they'd read the morning paper. And they'd come home at

night, and they'd read the evening paper. And they'd totally get caught up on stories that

were, you know, these are stories that are in some cases over a thousand words of

content. So, you know, that's pretty exciting to know that people were actually taking the

time back then to really dig into the details of, uh, significant news content. Then on top

of that, you had three networks—three networks delivering the news. That was it. So

everyone would just sit down instead of reading the paper and they'd actually watch an

entire 30-minute newscast from ABC, CBS, or NBC. And then, you'd sit down and

you'd watch the local news for another half hour, so they'd completely be updated. It

took time, but this is what everybody wanted to do. So people were really grounded in a

lot of uh…they were very well-rounded in terms of the information they were getting.

Nowadays, people go to uh, the various website, the various server that they use for their

e-mail and they'll see some headlines. These headlines have been, have been selected by

some editor somewhere. So you get five or six headlines, and that's your newscast for

the day. You go on Facebook, you might hear a little news story here or there from

friends wherever, and that's going to be your news for the day. So the information that

people are getting is, um, is not very thorough. The information that people are getting

isn't extremely well-rounded, and it really lends itself more towards pop culture than

some of the very, very deep issues of the day. So while those mediums that you just

mentioned are spectacular in so many ways, I think in terms of serving news content to

the general population, it's an overall disservice because we still really need to know, um,

all the layers of the story in order to make adequate decisions, especially regarding how,

for example, we want to be governed."

a.   Interviewer: "How has this political change through Facebook and Twitter

affected you personally?"

Respondent: "Um, well I will tell you, I really enjoy using Facebook and

Twitter, but I'm going to be perfectly, perfectly candid with you here, which is

something I really like doing. I use both of those tools for marketing purposes. I

use Facebook for marketing. It's a way for me to share with my audience stories

that are important to me, and therefore, increase just, build-by-brand, so people

are saying, 'Oh, well this is what Sussman's thinking today, this is what Sussman

has to say today.' I develop a relationship with these people. Because at the end

of the day, why am I doing this? Well, for me, it's a business relationship

because I do have a radio show, and I want to engage people and convince them

that my show's a show to listen to. Likewise, regarding, for example, uh, my

best-selling book, I would use Facebook to constantly promote the book. I would

take news stories and talk about them on Facebook and engage my readers and

people following me so that they would come back and say, 'You know what,

doggone it, this book really is good, this guy really is smart. He knows what he's

talking about. I'm going to recommend this book to a friend.' I'll do the same

thing with Twitter, and again use the marketing tools to stay in touch with my

listeners, my readers, etcetera, and encourage them just to know that I'm here, I'm

still talking, I'm still doing stuff, and next time I got a book, you're going to want

to buy it because we've been having this conversation. So, for me, it's a way to connect with people, and it's a marketing tool. And quite frankly, that's what Facebook and Twitter is to uh, you know, politicians, including Barack Obama. It's a great marketing tool. It's a way to keep people in your back pocket at all times."

4.   Interviewer: "Should authoritarian governments in the Middle East be threatened by Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "They should. They really should. And that's why, you know, you're seeing, for example, certain countries not allowing those entities to exist—because they are threatening. That's why you see that China, you know they really limit their Internet content and filter greatly and sensor greatly because they understand that this is a threat. But, you know, we're able to see, for example, in the Middle East, we know that Facebook and Twitter have been huge in helping people demonstrate—organize, demonstrate, um, their version of the flash mob, etcetera. So these are tremendous tools for political change, and it can be used both ways. The good guys and the bad guys can both have the medium, so I think that that makes it neat because it's an equal playing field. But what I think will be interesting to see is how authoritarian governments, um, and uh, dictatorial governments, etcetera, totalitarian governments, will just cut these mediums off. They don't want them to exist. And so, uh, when push comes to shove, they will pull the plug, so to speak."

    a.   Interviewer: "Why are authoritarian governments threatened by Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "Yeah, because they're just so effective. They allow people to talk to one another. You know, there was a time, uh…it's always a fascinating discussion when you speak to people, for example, in this very diverse Bay Area who are from the former Soviet Union, so they lived in the Soviet Union before 1991. And they remember how…in fact, you can talk to any one of these people, and they will all tell you of the uncle or the aunt or the father or the grandfather who was in prison because he or she decided to talk against the government. You know, back then, you just couldn't do that. You couldn't talk to your neighbor, even privately, about how much you thought the government, uh, you know, your thoughts about the government, how bad it was, because you were always afraid that your neighbor might, you know, spy on you. So with Facebook and Twitter, I think this gives people some sense of anonymity to communicate with one another. And it also allows people to be able to communicate with people they would never get a chance to communicate with. Um, you know, it's better than the phone, it's better than the walkie-talkie, it's better than any of that stuff. But this is a medium where you can really reach a lot of people in one particular time. And if you work it properly, you can, uh, really leverage that to change opinions, etcetera. So I think that's why it's effective. I think these totalitarian, authoritarian, uh bad guys, socialist, communist governments understand that, and right now, they don't know what to do, other than pull a plug on these, uh, wonderful platforms."

5.   Interviewer: "In general, did Internet shutdowns in the Middle East encourage or discourage civilians to use Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "Well, people can be…if someone thinks Big Brother is listening into your conversation, uh, that's going to be a very intimidating factor. And I do know there are stories you can find on a regular basis, where people, for example, in China, which we have to remember is a communist country, are being busted on a regular basis for the various communications that they're involved with over the Internet. So totalitarian, authoritarian, dictatorial governments can be very, very intimidating because people know the consequences. My gosh, if you get caught, let's say with something on Facebook, and they trace it back to you, you can wind up in jail. And their jails aren't like ours. Ours are bad enough, but theirs are ten times as bad. Um, so you know, that kind of a fear in the hearts and souls of the various individuals can be very, very impactful. But nonetheless, there's this other thing inside each one of us—we all desire freedom. We all want to live freely; we love liberty deep down in our hearts. So with that in mind, there's some who are going to come to Facebook and Twitter and even just regular e-mail and say, 'To heck with it, I've got to do this. This is for the better of the people. I've got to say this. I've got to organize to do this. I've got to share this news story for the sake of freedom, for the sake of liberty.' So, you see all emotions in this particular, uh, realm in which we're speaking. That's what makes life so exciting. That's what makes countries great, and that's what can make countries bad. But I think that these social mediums are at the very heart and soul of what's happening today, and it's important that they exist."

a.   Interviewer: "Can you please provide an example of the government Internet shutdowns could encourage civilians in the Middle East?"

Respondent: "Well, it encourages…those types of activities encourage citizens because it confirms that their governments are wrong. You know, when you got this wonderful tool that you've been able to use to communicate with people all over the world. Uh, and that's what I think is fascinating about it. You know, I have had Facebook conversations with people in the Middle East, and, uh, to me, I haven't really received any breaking news, but as I mentioned earlier, it provides texture that's very exciting. Because hey, I just talked to somebody in the Middle East. I just talked to somebody abroad. I just talked to somebody in Egypt. Um, so that's really encouraging. So when the government shuts that down, you're taking away—it's almost like withholding a treat, you know, from a starving dog. You're taking something away that they had that now they do not have, and you're depriving them of the ability to communicate and to share and to, uh, to gain news as well. And I'm sure that, you know, I think that it just emboldens a citizenry when they see the government act in these particular ways."

6.   Interviewer: "Should the United States have gotten involved in the situation in the Middle East by helping repressive countries gain access to social media?"

Respondent: "Well, I think the technology is really cool. And I think enabling people to communicate, especially in repressive societies, is a really good thing. But I'll give you an example of something I don't like, and it has to do, once again, with China. I don't like the fact that Google has gone over there and helped the Chinese government have a censored version of Google. That bothers me because, again, you're helping a repressive government further censorship. I just don't think that's right. I realize for

Google, it involved a lot of money, and I understand that people that run Google are not

immoral, they're not moral; they're amoral. It's just, you know, for the business. But

um, I think that allowing all these countries to have access to these wonderful platforms

is huge, um, when you help the government censor or tailor those particular, um,

mediums to fit the needs of the regime—I think that's wrong. People are crafty; they'll

always find a way to use these things if the technology exists. So that's encouraging as

well. The problem is they have to do it, um, you know, at their own risk because there

are great consequences if they're to be discovered using these technologies against the

government's wishes."

    a.   Interviewer: "So you believe that the US should help people in the Middle

East gain that sort of freedom?"

Respondent: "Yeah, I think that would be great, especially now. But keep

in mind, it's not just…I think having the technology available is fantastic. And if

American countries are involved in that or the United States is sponsoring that,

that's great. But keep in mind, even in the Middle East, Al Qaeda, the Muslim

Brotherhood, the Mosque, they're all using these mediums. You got everybody

out there using the same technology for completely different purposes. So I

suppose, with that in mind, you say, 'Okay, put it out there. Let them all use it.

Let the buyer beware.'"

    b.   Interviewer: "Why should the United States get involved?"

Respondent: "Well, you know, we do have this tradition of helping the

world with freedom. And we have another tradition, and it's some of the greatest

improvements, some of the greatest technologies and life-enhancing, um, products

have been made in America. We're also a very charitable country. We're known

for our good works around the world, whether it be distributing food or the

various charities that are out there providing hospital or dental services and

medical services around the world. So people do look to use for the good stuff we

provide, and that includes our technology. If the government can open doors for

this technology to be used, especially to allow people to communicate and

perhaps encourage them to bring about change in their countries that will really be

changes involving liberty and freedom, I think it's a good thing because that's

really what the United States is supposed to be all about."

APPENDIX B

Interview: Lee Perkins

The following interview is part of a descriptive qualitative research study conducted to illustrate the power of collaboration through social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, to impact political unrest in the Middle East.

Interviewer: Sarah Goodman

Respondent: Lee Perkins

Date of Interview: 5/12/11

Opening Comments:

1. Interviewer: "Could you please give me a brief intro or bio about yourself?"

   Respondent: "Well, I'm a graduate of Cal Poly. I got my Master's in Guidance and Counseling from Cal Poly, and my undergraduate was in History back east at um, in the SUNY system in New York State. I'm a mother of two. I'm retired now from Cal Poly. And things I enjoy doing—I'm a community activist, gardening, swimming, camping, traveling. That's pretty much it."

2. Interviewer: "Are you more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media?"

   Respondent: "Yes, definitely. However, I think what the American people get reported is not the big picture. I think it's, uh, I wouldn't say censored, but it's somewhat selective. And that's why when we had a speaker from Cal Poly come to our Democratic Club, who had just returned from Egypt—I mean, she really told us what was happening on the street. And you know, maybe for Egypt anyways, it seemed like we had some good, fairly decent reporting. But I think part of that was…it was cleaner to report in a

sense because Mubarak, the president who already said he had to go, and the people

demonstrating were very peaceful. And, so that's just my feeling about that. But the

social media—you mean, um, e-mail and Facebook and all that stuff—uh, I'm not a user

of those, but my daughter is, both my daughters are, and I see how it was used in Egypt.

It was amazing. I mean, uh, the speaker we had said that while she was there—she was

at the tail end of the demonstrations, the major demonstrations—and she said she was on

the street with an Egyptian woman and she got a text at a coffee shop that the next day

there were going to be a big demonstration. And it just happened. I mean, it's pretty

amazing. I saw the Frontline story. Um, did you see that? It's just like, 'woah.' Part of

it is the people, I think, have been discriminated against versus the very rich having all

the benefits in Egypt, and so they've been voices for many years, for decades. And I

think that came together. But I think what brought it together is the ability to text and the

social media that exists there. And once people find they have a voice, it makes all the

difference. And of course, that has spread to Tunisia and then Egypt and Libya now.

Libya is not clean; it's not so clean. It's much more complicated. Not to say that Egypt

isn't, but um, it's even more, I think."

a.   Interviewer: "How do you think you're more aware of the events as a

result of social media?"

Respondent: "Well, it was reported in the main media that that was how it

happened. But to actually see it on Frontline, which I really—Frontline I really

trust—um, that programming in general really seems to go a little deeper. Um,

and so you saw first hand the people involved and how they did it and how they

were somewhat fearless. Pretty amazing."

3.   Interviewer: "Do you believe Facebook and Twitter have helped lead to political change?"

Respondent: "Well, I think they're a tool that's been used. And in Egypt, it worked very effectively. Uh, and I'm not sure why it was more effective—I don't know what happened in Tunisia. I'm not sure why—I know more about Egypt. I'm not sure why it was more effective in Egypt, and I don't know how…and it seems like it's pretty pervasive in Egypt that the youth and people have cell phones. I don't know about Tunisia and Libya. Uh, I think even though Egypt, the richness of the country wasn't passed down and employment was really low, people had cell phones and the consciousness of the youth. So it really seemed effective in Egypt. Whereas in Libya, you don't really hear about it, so I'm not sure how it's, how effective it is there."

a.   Interviewer: "How has this political change through Facebook and Twitter affected you personally?"

Respondent: "Well I'm really, I'm really glad for the people—that they have a voice and that they've been able to, in Egypt specifically, that they have been able to demonstrate and bring down Mubarak. Now it's really questionable where it will go from there because the same forces are still in power; the figurehead is gone. So it's really a situation to be watched, and I think the social media has its limits. It can get the people out to the street, but if the military were to turn against the people, I'm not sure what would happen. And they did, you know, they did shut down social media for a while, and they were forced to put it back because so many people were coming out. So, again, it's not too hard to

shut down, like in Iran, it's more limited. But, you know, when it's available, it

really seems to make a difference."

4.   Interviewer: "Should authoritarian governments in the Middle East be threatened

by Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "Well, I think they are. I don't think there's any question about it.

That's why it was shut down, and that's why it's, it's um, controlled in Iran."

   a.   Interviewer: "Why are they threatened?"

Respondent: "Because it's a tool to organize, and it's so instant and people

are attuned to it. It's uh, even…you know, I'm not sure how they got the word

out in Egypt, if you had to buy into a certain, uh, organization in order to get

notified, or—I'm not sure how they did that. But if it's a central thing and

everyone gets it automatically, I don't know how they do that. Then, it hits all

ages, all ages and social economic groups."

5.   Interviewer: "In general, did the Internet shutdowns in the Middle East encourage

or discourage civilians to use Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "Well, they're already out on the street, so they just stay there—in

Egypt, again. So, they were forced to lift that. But in, if you compare Iran, the

enforcement was so brutal that people were forced to leave the streets, regardless of what

message. I mean, the people that are organizing—they don't want…they were able to do

it peacefully in Egypt, but when the government is not peaceful and comes down and is

killing people in the street and people don't have arms, you know like, it's really civil

war in Libya. So it's a different situation. I think it still is a tool. I think it's still used

for those that have access to it."

6.   Interviewer: "Should the United States have gotten involved in the situation in the

Middle East by helping repressive countries gain access to social media?"

        Respondent: "Um, I think indirectly, the support they gave to the demonstrators in

Egypt, uh, because there were stories about how the people, when they heard the news

about what Barack Obama said—I mean, they were really, it's interesting, they're more

conscious about what's going on than most Americans. They really watch what the

leaders of the world are saying and how that affects their country if something big is

happening. Where somehow this country, it's so big—that's part of it. In Egypt, it's a

smaller country, even though that's a really big city. Cairo, where the demonstrations

were, is a really big city; it's still a smaller entity. Same thing in France when they have

demonstrations. Um, it's easier to organize a country that size than it is the whole United

States, which has, at least, four different regions."

        a.   Interviewer: "So you think the United States should have gotten involved,

        but indirectly?"

        Respondent: "I think they did just by giving support to the demonstrators.

        You know, I don't think they would step in and do…where they step in is when

        civilians are being killed, like in Libya—they step in there. But I don't think they

        have control…I'm sure they have some control that we don't even know about,

        some access. But I think, from what we know, they're not directly doing that. At

        least, I'm not aware of it."

        b.   Interviewer: "Why should they get involved?"

        Respondent: "You know, I don't think they need to get involved in that. I

        think, again, supporting a country that is standing up for democracy and health

care and jobs and education—that's what we're about. We support that in other

countries. I think by doing that and giving support, whether it's verbal or in

Egypt, they gave, um, support to NATO—air support. I mean, that is helpful. So

I don't, I don't, from what I see, I don't see them getting directly involved and

saying, you know, you have to lift, you have to let the newspapers come out, you

have to let liberal press. I don't see them doing that directly, that I'm aware of.

And again, I would support…rather than getting involved in that, because that's

really for the people to do their own newspapers and things like that. Rather than

do that, I think what they are doing is supporting a country that has

demonstrations because they want, they have basic needs that aren't being met."

APPENDIX C

Interview: Manzar Foroohar

The following interview is part of a descriptive qualitative research study conducted to illustrate the power of collaboration through social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, to impact political unrest in the Middle East.

Interviewer: Sarah Goodman

Respondent: Manzar Foroohar

Date of Interview: 5/12/11

Opening Comments:

1.　　　Interviewer: "Could you please give me a brief into or bio about yourself?"

　　　　Respondent: "Well I was born and raised in Iran. Then I came to United States for education. I got my PhD from UCLA, and I've been working at Cal Poly for about 24 years. So I'm a full professor of history."

2.　　　Interviewer: "Are you more aware of the events in the Middle East as a result of social media?"

　　　　Respondent: "Not really. I've always been aware of the events in the Middle East because I was always interested. I always follow, uh, the news events, and I've traveled there a lot. So of course, social media recently has made my job a little easier, but it hasn't made a major change in how I get news."

　　　a.　　　Interviewer: "I'd like to remind you that the news media has used social media to report on the Middle East. With that said, do you think you're more aware of the situation in the Middle East as a result of social media?"

Respondent: "Not really. Not for me, personally. Because like right now, one of my main source of news of the Middle East are academic books, academic scholar journals like Merip, a journal of Middle Eastern studies. And when it comes to daily news, it's either the newspapers, which are online, uh, from the area, like for example, Al Masry Al Youm from Egypt or Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera is one of the major news media that all of us follow. The online newspapers in Israel I always follow. So no, I don't go to Twitter or Facebook. I'm not even a member of Facebook. So no, I don't get my information from those."

3. Interviewer: "Do you believe that Facebook and Twitter have helped lead to political change?"

Respondent: "No, they haven't helped to lead to political change. They have made it a little easier because people make political changes. If you look at the situation in Tunisia or Egypt today, it was the people who went into the street. It was not the Facebook. So it was the people who decided to make these changes because of the situation. But because of the technology, it makes it easier for them to connect and organize. So basically, social media is a facilitator of these movements; it's not the leaders or beginning of these movements."

a. Interviewer: "But you believe it helped lead to political change?"

Respondent: "Yeah, as I said, it helped to connect people together to spread the information."

b. Interviewer: "How has this political change affected you personally?"

Respondent: "Well, I'm very happy. I'm very proud of the people of the Middle East, and I'm hoping that they will continue this movement and they will

reach to democratic states, democratic regimes that they do deserve. The job is not done yet. This is just the very first step; this is just the very beginning. We have a long, long way to go. I'm hoping that people continue that way."

4.   Interviewer: "Should authoritarian governments in the Middle East be threatened by Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "Yeah, they have all this filtered and with any form of information. Because just like any other dictatorship all over the world, the way that they rule is keeping people uninformed, and social media is breaking that breech for the people. It's connect people together and facilitating the dissemination of information."

a.   Interviewer: "Why are authoritarian governments in the Middle East threatened by Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "Because as I said, one of the way they can rule for such a long time was keeping people uninformed from the situation—like full censorship over media. But now with this social media, that makes the job much more difficult."

5.   Interviewer: "In general, did Internet shutdowns in the Middle East encourage or discourage civilians to use Facebook and Twitter?"

Respondent: "When you talk about Facebook and Twitter, it's not that everybody in the Middle East is using it. For example, in Egypt, I don't believe any more than 20 percent of people use this. So, it's not like United States. It's not that everybody gets the news from social media, but the minority of very young educated people were on the Facebook, were on Twitter. They helped to spread the word. But it's not that everybody depends on that. As I said, these movements are happening because of people, because

of their conditions that existed there, because we needed these movements. And these

movements happen even if it didn't have any Facebook or any social media, it was going

to happen anyway because of the explosive conditions of the area. But social media has

made it faster, made it more rapid because it disseminated information."

    a.   Interviewer: "Do you think that the Internet shutdowns encouraged people

        to go out on the street?"

        Respondent: "I don't think it had that of much impact on them because

        people were already on the street. In the Middle East, people are very community

        oriented. So when one person knows about something, then the whole

        neighborhood will find out about it. So it's not that they went to the street to

        defend the Internet; they were already in the street. The government shut down

        the Internet hoping that the information about the repression…it was the same

        time they were attacking people on the street. They were killing people on the

        street near Cairo. So the government was hoping that by shutting down the

        Internet, people outside could not get the news, which of course they were

        wrong."

6.   Interviewer: "Should the United States have gotten involved in the situation in the

Middle East by helping repressive governments gain access to the Internet?"

        Respondent: "Well, the US government is already involved in the Middle East.

One of the major reasons that we have so many dictators in the Middle East is because

United States has been helping them, has been assisting them all these years. So if

United States wants to help Middle Eastern people, is just stay out of it. Do not help

dictatorial regimes. Do not help people, regimes who repress their own people, torture

people, kill people, including, for example, Yemen, for example, Bahrain right now.

These are the two very explosive situations. Syria, another one, Israel, another very

important situation—Israeli government is living because we assist them, and they're

killing Palestinians on daily basis. So if United States wants to help Middle Easterners,

just to stay out of it completely."

a.   Interviewer: "You don't think they should get involved at all?"

   Respondent: "No, it's none of our business. We're not the police of the

Middle East or the world. I mean, the reason that we're being involved so much

in the Middle East is because of our own economic interests and because of…we

wanted to serve our economic interests, we help the worst kind of dictatorships in

the Middle East. As I said, if we want to be good to people, if we want to be

humanitarian in international situations, stay out of it completely. Stop sending

billions of dollars every year to the Middle East. Stop sending all this

sophisticated arms to the Middle East."

b.   Interviewer: "How about to helping people in the Middle East, not the

government?"

   Respondent: "People of the Middle East are not asking for the help of the

west. They're more than capable of taking care of themselves. But the only

reason they haven't been able to do it so far is because United States and other

western European countries help to dictators. If we stop helping those dictators,

Middle Easterners are very much capable of taking care of them."