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Social Media and Egypt's Arab Spring

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Social Media and Egypt's Arab Spring

By LCdr G.W. Bunghardt

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Oh my broken heart;
Don't spend all your life mourning;
You might not be a great leader;
But you have millions of people behind you;
If your seeds grow;
Salah al-Din might rise.[1]

- Hamza Namira, Egyptian Singer/Songwriter

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Egypt underwent a fundamental political change, brought about through a populist movement known as the Arab Spring. Although several other Middle East and North African (MENA) states experienced the same phenomenon in similar, overlapping time frames, it would be myopic to treat the Arab Spring as a single entity and assume that the revolutions in each country were the same. Some similarities may have been shared among some countries, however, each state had its own unique set of conditions prior to, during, and after the events of the Arab Spring. Egypt was no exception. Interestingly, in many of the revolutions associated with the Arab Spring, the role of social media in facilitating change has been highly celebrated, almost as a revolutionary's panacea. This paper will prove that although social media played an important role in Egypt's Arab Spring, it was only one of many factors that contributed to the revolution's success.

It has been noted that the Arab Spring spread across the MENA region with "historical momentousness and stunning speed."[2] Although revolution is not an unknown

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[1]Sean Foley, "When Life Imitates Art: The Arab Spring, the Middle East, and the Modern World," *Alternatives Turkish Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 38.

event in the region, the aforementioned speed at which the revolution moved and spread

certainly caught many regional experts off-guard. In fact, many Arab scholars who were

dedicated observers of Egypt's political structure and process were as surprised as the

layperson as to the significant change that occurred in the region in a very short period of

time.[3]

It is generally accepted that the event that provided the catalyst for the Arab

Spring was the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi. What made Mr.

Bouazizi's ultimate act of protest significant at an international level was the fact that his

self-immolation was captured on film and widely distributed.[4] The revolutionary events

that followed Mr. Bouazizi's self-sacrifice in Tunisia[5] spread quickly to other states,

including Egypt.

As 2010 ended with Tunisia in the throes of the Arab Spring, Egypt was in a

precarious position. In many ways, the country was barely being held together due to a

myriad of internal issues. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, who had come to power

thirty years earlier, was facing several systemic issues that were causing continual and

accelerating problems for his regime and he was either unwilling or unable to affect

change. In particular, Mubarak's government was increasingly having difficulty

providing basic government services and seemed to be indifferent to "widespread

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[2]Essam Mansour, "The role of social networking sites (SNSs) in the Junary 25th Revolution in Egypt," *Library Review* 61, no. 2 (2012): 128.

[3]F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July/August 2011): 81.

[4]Habibul Haque Khondker, "Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring," *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (October 2011): 677.

[5]For a more full account of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, consult Peter J. Schraeder, "Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, International Intervention, and Popular Sovereignty," *The Whitehead Jounral of Diplomacy and International* Relations 13, no. 1, (Winter 2012): 75-88.

unemployment and poverty [that] alienated tens of millions of Egyptians."[6] Further

complicating matters was the air of blatant nepotism that permeated through Egypt's

political structure, including a sense that President Mubarak's son Gamal and his cronies

were reaping the remaining wealth and opportunity in Egypt.[7]

These fundamental social issues, that had been building up over the preceding 30

years laid a foundation of unease. The Egyptian people were naturally becoming

increasingly dissatisfied with life in Mubarak's Egypt. By 2011, it has been estimated

that almost 40 percent of Egypt's population was living below the poverty line.[8] While

this number on its own is significant, what is perhaps more important is the fact that the

percentage of Egyptians living in poverty was increasing. Understandably, many

Egyptians were becoming unsettled by the deteriorating conditions of their country.

Egypt's economic decline was further exasperated by several systemic factors that were

roundly ignored by the Mubarak regime. It has been noted that many professionals were

required to supplement their income with second jobs just to meet their minimum

requirements while, at the same time, endemic bribery among public officials including

the police[9] further undermined the value of public service work as well as trust in the

state. Egypt's social-economic situation was clearly not in a favourable position for

growth, and had little capacity for additional pressure.

The decreasing quality of governmental services and increasing nepotism

occurred at a time when the fundamental composition of Egyptian society was also

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[6]Lisa Anderson, "Demystifying that Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no 3 (May/June 2011): 3.

[7]*Ibid*.
[8]Sean Foley, "When Life Imitates Art…", 36.
[9]*Ibid.*

changing. At the time of the Arab Spring, an increasing percentage of the Egyptian population was young. The age range of 18 to 29 years accounted for a quarter of the population of Egypt, while more significantly, the age range of 12 to 35 years accounted for approximately one half of the population.[10] Not only was there a growing proportion of youth in Egypt, but these youth were also becoming increasingly urbanized and educated.[11] It is easy to build the links among decreasing social conditions, an increasingly educated youth bulge, and the potential for dramatic change. Hence, the stage was set for Egypt's Arab Spring. The following sections will provide an in-depth exploration of how social media facilitated, but did not cause the successful revolution in Egypt.

ANTE SEDITIO

As identified in the introduction, as 2010 drew to a close, Egypt exhibited some of the prime indicators that a country is ready for change. This section will identify factors that influenced the Arab Spring in Egypt prior to the actual revolution and examine the role that social media played in affecting each factor.

Egypt's internal conditions seemed to be approaching a tipping point in 2010. A year earlier, however, external influence began being applied to Egypt in a subtle way. In a marked change from the United States' former President George W. Bush's attempts to spread democracy through force in places such as Iraq, President Barrack Obama's

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[10]Newpaper Article. "Egypt, Arab Spring and new politics," *Pakistan Today*, 7 December 2013.
[11]*Ibid.*

administration embarked on a much more measured approach to encouraging the spread

of democracy. In June of 2009, Obama addressed an audience at Cairo University.

Obama's speech, in part, spoke directly to the people of Egypt when he declared that he

believed that universally people desired "the ability to speak your mind and have a say in

how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of

justice; government that is transparent…"[12] These words were clearly, and perhaps

uncomfortably, a candid comment on the state of affairs within Egypt. Obama, perhaps

more controversially, also suggested that people had the "freedom to live as you

choose."[13] Although Egyptian President Mubarak was in the audience for this address,

Obama did not seem to restrain his belief in openly promoting self-determination.

The concepts of a just society about which Obama spoke, and his encouragement

of people to live according to their own choices represented a significant message from

the President of the most powerful country on the globe. The president of the Palestine-

Israel Journal, Hillel Schenker, has gone so far as to suggest that Obama was inviting

"democracy from the grass roots….[and that] there was a seed laid by President Obama

in his Cairo speech."[14] This powerful message was conveyed through traditional press

around the world. The subsequent actions during the Arab Spring in Egypt followed the

tenets referenced by Obama in his Cairo University speech. Hence, this idea, or seed, was

the result of a speech act by a powerful president. In this example, the role of social

media was that of a medium to spread the message, much as the mainstream media, but in

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[12]Ian Black, "Barack Obama, the Arab spring and a series of unforeseen events," *The Guardian*, 21 October 2012.
[13]*Ibid*.
[14]Round Table Discussion. "The Arab Spring," *Palestine-Israel Jounral* 18, no. 1 (2012): 137 - 138.

a direct, immediate and uncensored way. In effect, it was the important words of President Obama that gained traction, and as such provided much more gravity in the plight of Egyptians than social media in this example.

Similar to the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia that was captured on film, Egypt had its own case of a violent death visually recorded and broadcast on the internet for the world to see. In this case, although social media played an important role in spreading the message, it was the terrible act of murder that provided the impetus for change.

Whereas Mr. Bouazizi's act was a deliberate political act, the death of Khaled Said[15] at the hands of Egyptian police was an act that was not originally intended to have a political purpose. On June 6, 2010, Mr. Said was forcibly removed from an Egyptian internet café and subsequently beaten to death by Egyptian police in Alexandria.[16] Consistent with the endemic corruption in Egypt, the reason Mr. Said was beaten to death by the police was because he had "posted a video of the police officers dividing up the spoils of a drug bust."[17] Mr. Said's beating was later recounted on film by the owner of the internet café where the incident occurred, and subsequently posted online. The power of the internet in aiding Egypt's Arab Spring became readily apparent, particularly after Wael Ghonim, who was an executive for Google, became aware of the incident and anonymously created a Facebook page honouring Mr. Said.

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[15]The spelling of Khaled Said's name varies throughout journal articles. For consistency purposes, I have adopted the most common spelling for the purposes of this paper.
[16]Habibul Haque Khondker, "Role of the New Media…", 677.
[17]Sean Foley, "When Life Imitates Art…", 37.

After the death of Mr. Said, social media, and in particular, Facebook played a

critical role in spreading the word about the brutal nature of Mr. Said's death to

Egyptians and to the world at large. The Facebook page quickly gained notoriety, and

within a few days 50 000 people had viewed it.[18] Over the coming days and weeks, the

true power of the social media's ability to mass-diffuse information became evident. In

fact, the Facebook page dedicated to Mr. Said became a focal point for Egyptians, with

eventually 470 000 people associating themselves with the page.[19] Although Facebook,

as a form of social media served to spread Mr. Said's tragic story to Egyptians, it did so

in the capacity of a tool of the revolutionaries. Social media in this case, made it easier

for people to know about what happened in Alexandria. It was not social media that

spurred people to action, but rather, the beating death of Mr. Said.

After the Arab Spring, when reflecting on his involvement in the establishment of

the Facebook page, Mr. Ghonim acknowledged the powerful impact that social media

had on the revolution. In an interview with Bloomberg Businessweek, Mr. Ghonim made

two pertinent revelations. When discussing the Arab Spring in Egypt, he indicated that

once he was revealed as the creator of the Facebook page, he felt enormous responsibility

for the content of the page because if he abused "a tool like this…at the end of the day, it

could lead to people dying."[20] This recognition of social media as a tool is important in

that it implies that for the Arab Spring in Egypt it was an influential factor, among other

factors that inspired and brought about change. Mr. Ghonim goes further when describing

[18]*Ibid.*

[19]Mustafa Kamal and Pamela Meenalochani, "Byte is Mightier Than The Sword: Egypt Revolution of 2011," *International Jounral of Management & Information Systems* 16, no. 4 (Fourth Quarter 2012): 341.

[20]Charlie Rose, "Charlie Rose talks to Wael Ghonim," *Bloomberg Business Week*, February 20-February 26, 2012: 20.

the process of the revolution when he explained that "If the Arab revolution taught us something, it's that the power of the people is greater than the people in power."[21] Mr. Ghonim clearly highlights the importance of people in a revolution. Without the action of the people, a revolution is not possible. Technology, such as social media can serve as a tool to facilitate a revolution, but without the desire or outrage to cause change, no change will occur.

Leading to the Arab Spring, the Egyptian populace had been in the process of developing an effective culture of protest. For example, from 1998 to 2004, there were over 1 000 strikes or labour sit-ins in Egypt.[22] The number of protests and defiance based actions continued to increase and in 2009 alone there were 1 000 such events.[23] In many cases, these protest movements harnessed the benefits of using social media. Again, in this example, social media did not, in itself, provide a solution or effect change, but it was used effectively as a tool for inspiring, organizing, and supporting the crucial mass of people required to disrupt the status quo.

One such movement that had been gathering momentum in the lead up to Egypt's Arab Spring was the 2008 April 6 Youth Movement. The Movement was an encompassing group that consisted in part of bloggers, journalists, and academics.[24] This group launched a very successful protest on April 6 2008, by rallying many Egyptians to support a strike by industrial workers. Subsequent rallies, however, in 2009 and 2010

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[21]*Ibid.*
[22]Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, "Protest Movements and Political Change in the Arab World," *Carnegie Endoment for International Peace Policy Outlook*, (January 28 2011): 2.
[23]*Ibid.*, 3.
[24]*Ibid.*

were less successful,[25] despite the fact that there were social media activists involved. This indicates that although social media could play an important role in organizing a protest, social media in itself was not enough to carry and sustain a protest.

What is perhaps more critical than the mere existence of social media is its power to include previously considered out groups in protests and popular action. Although the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt was fairly successful in 2008 and had an important constituency of activists, it followed the Egyptian tradition of not mixing activism with political parties. In Egypt, "protest leaders have been careful to distance collective action from political parties, strongly denying any alleged links."[26] This becomes important when one considers the prominent role that the Muslim Brotherhood played during Egypt's Arab Spring, particularly when contrasted to the fact that they were intentionally excluded from previous April 6 Youth Movement strike action. From this, it becomes apparent that in order for a revolution to be successful, its purpose and action base must be inclusive. If a revolution is not inclusive, social media cannot act as such a force multiplier that makes up for the exclusion of out groups.

The hypothesis that inclusivity plays a greater role than a medium is further supported by consideration of the secular and religious divides that existed in Egypt prior to the Arab Spring. In pre-revolution Egypt, there had been a history of many religious and secular institutions not blending well. For example, "the chasm between the two wings had grown so wide that secular lawyers would not publicly defend Islamist

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[25]*Ibid*.

[26]*Ibid*., 8.

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political detainees, and vice versa."[27] The absence of common ground among religious

and secular groups prevented them from presenting a united front to the Mubarak regime

which, in turn, further perpetuated the status quo in Egypt. As Tapas Ray notes, although

social media had been around for a considerable length of time in Egypt, the disunity

among factions prevented a coherent opposition to Mubarak. It was only after the

religious and secularists worked more closely together that the power of social media

could be harnessed.[28] It is thus possible to see that although social media is a highly

useful tool, social media alone cannot cause or lead a revolution. As is seen throughout

history, revolutions require a critical mass, in terms of the number of people who want

change combined with a common desire and willingness to affect that change.

The role of a country's culture can never be discounted in bringing about social

change. Movies, literature, music, art, and folklore each play an important role in the

sharing of cultural history, trends, shifts, and concerns. Leading up to the Arab Spring,

Egypt was no exception. Although in many cases artists used social media to disseminate

their messages, it was in fact the message that was important, and not so much the

medium, be it a traditional form of cultural communication or social media.

As noted earlier, the divides between religious and secular societies in Egypt were

deep. Interestingly, two musical artists, an Egyptian named Hamza Namira and a

Lebanese-Swede named Maher Zain, under the promotion of Awakening Records

became popular with the youth in Cairo.[29] Although one artist was secular and the other

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[27]Tapas Ray, "The 'story' of digital excess in revolutions of the Arab Spring," *Journal of Media Pracice* 12, no. 2 (2011): 193.

[28]*Ibid*.

[29]Sean Foley, "When Life Imitates Art…", 37.

was religious, both used their music to speak of the same issues. In particular, both artists' music was critical of the way Arab countries were being run and further, provided "a vision of what that society might look like, a pathway to get there, and hope that such a vision could eventually be achieved."[30] Although social media can reach many with form of message, it is hard to discount the pervasive nature of messages couched in popular culture, such as music. As a song gains popularity, its message is spread wider and wider. What becomes particularly important with the examples of Namira and Zain is that the audience with which these two artists were especially popular was young professionals, a group that in any country is upwardly mobile in terms of influence. As explained in the introduction, Egypt's young make up a massive proportion of the population. As such, because ideas such as making Egypt more palatable for Egyptians resonated with this segment of the population, it provided even more fodder for the revolution.

What social media provided for artists who promoted political and social change was a method of augmenting their message. For example, Maher Zain used Facebook and YouTube to promote album sales, propelling him to become "the first Muslim artist to reach one million fans on Facebook."[31] What is important to note is that although social media was used for promotion of Namira and Zain's material, it was the content of their songs, rather than social media itself that touched and polarized the people of Egypt. As Sean Foley further explains, the work of these two artists did not cause protests. Rather, it "reflected a wide-spread feeling of discontent, a desire for a different future, and

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[30]*Ibid*., 38.
[31]*Ibid*., 39.

collective vision for how Arabs could reach that future."[32] It can therefore be seen that these artists captured a popular sentiment in Egypt; the country was ready for change. Their music provided some clarity of thought to the plight of Egyptians, particularly youth. Social media helped their music reach a wider audience. At the root of the issue, however, was the fact that many of the critical mass of Egyptian people wanted, were ready for, and were willing to take action for significant systemic change to the way that their country was being led.

Approaching the height of Egypt's Arab Spring, many of the critical building blocks for a successful revolution were in place. Although social media played an important role in transmitting or sharing information about President Obama's address, the beating death of Khaled Said, Wael Ghonim's outrage, the April 6 Youth Movement, and pop artists' hope for change, it was these key events and people that galvanized Egyptian society and made the state ready for revolution. Social media's role was important in the diffusion of information, but without the aforementioned events, social media on its own would not have spurred a revolution.

IN MEDIO EJUS SEDITIO

As discussed in the previous section, in the lead-up to the pinnacle of Egypt's Arab Spring, several factors combined set the stage for a successful revolution. Each factor, including social media, played an important role in the eventual overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. During the revolution, social media also played an important

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[32]*Ibid.*, 40.

role in the events that were to unfold. Much like prior to the revolution however, without the stage being set by particular events, social media on its own would not have brought about a regime change in Egypt.

Mass protests are often the hallmark of popular uprisings. During the Arab Spring in Egypt, several significant mass protests occurred. Tahrir Square in Cairo, which had been a focal point for protests several times during the twentieth century played a crucial role as a venue for Egyptian demonstrators during the Arab Spring. Social media played a role in the organization of these protests, but it was the critical mass of people involved that brought about change in Egypt.

For any protest to be successful, it must get the attention of both the prevailing political regime and the world community, and it must do so with sufficient numbers or gravitas. In the case of Egypt, it became apparent that the movement for change was growing exponentially as demonstrated through the sheer number of people that gathered in the streets of Cairo. The multi-faceted Arabic and English broadcaster Al Jazeera has estimated that as many as one million people took part in the protests in and around Tahrir Square.[33] This awe inspiring number does not account for the protests that took part in other cities in Egypt during the Arab Spring. Although this number of one million protestors represents the apogee of the protests, it does not take away from the quick build up in the preceding days. A regime that was once able to look away from smaller protests could not ignore such a massive public uprising.

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[33]Newspaper Article. "Protestors flood Egypt streets," *Al Jazeera,* 1 February 2011.

If one accepts that the number of people physically present and involved in Egypt's protests was in and of itself significant enough to bring about change, then this warrants a closer examination of the important role of social media in facilitating the massive congregation. Professor Mehdi Noorbaksh has explained that "social media was used to publicize times and locations of anti-government protests and to identify opposition groups."[34] At face value, this statement is quite bold in its attribution of responsibility for the mass protests in Egypt. However, on deeper examination, it is apparent that although social media was unquestionably important in the organization of protests, it was not the sole reason why the protests were successful.

In January of 2011 when the Arab Spring was gaining momentum in Egypt, only roughly five percent of the population was using Facebook. Further, less than 25% of the country self-identified as internet users.[35] Given the relatively low numbers of internet and specifically Facebook users in Egypt, it must be accepted that social media could only have played a partial role in the successful organization of the protests and their outcomes. Social media may have provided an initial spark, but it is likely that word of mouth within and among the communities of Cairo and other Egyptian centres also played a significant role in the organization of protests and the alignment of citizens for a common purpose.

Notwithstanding the relatively small number of internet users in Egypt at the time of the protests, it has been stated that "hundreds or thousands of people appeared in

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[34]Sheila Riley, "Social Media One Key to the Arab Spring," *Investor's Business Daily*, (31 October 2011): A6.
[35]Elizabeth Bryant, "The Iron Fist vs. the Microchip," *Journal of Strategic Security* 5, no. 2 (2012): 12.

Tahrir Square in Cairo because text messages and tweets summoned them."[36] Text messages and tweets alone, however do not cause or determine the success of a revolution. The consistent and evident will of the people cannot be discounted. Mubarak, perhaps not understanding this concept, and perhaps falsely attributing too much to the potential of social media attempted to shut down access to it by turning off the proverbial internet tap. However, by attempting to cut off access to internet and phone networks, Mubarak achieved the opposite effect. Rather than stymying protests, the denial of social media and other internet sources "forced thousands of pro-democracy activists, who had been following the events on their computer screens and mobile phones, to go to El-Tahrir Square to see what was happening."[37] Here, the removal of the internet and social media spurred people to take action.

Mosques, a quintessential community gathering place, also fulfilled an important role in the organization of Arab Spring protests. Although social media is sometimes attributed completely with the organization of these protests, Oleg Demidov has astutely noted the important role that mosques played. Demidov contends that mosques were the main venue for the coordination of protests and that some mosques were even turned into "command and control centers after Friday prayers."[38] It was the action of people through their protests that brought about change, both through the use of social media and perhaps more importantly through traditional word of mouth.

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[36]Carlo Ratti and Anthony Townsend, "The Social Nexus," *Scientific American* 305, no. 3 (September 2011): 2.

[37]Essam Mansour, "The role of social networking…", 134.
[38]Oleg Demidov, "Social Networks in International and National Security," *Security Index* 18, no. 1 (2011): 25.

Mainstream media has played an important role in many revolutions. Its role is multi-faceted; it can share the story of revolutionaries or that of the regime. Its target can either be internal to the nation or external to the world community. Since its inception, "the media has always been considered a strategic weapon in any conflict."[39] In some ways, social media has affected how the mainstream media conducts its business. During and after the Arab Spring, "American news outlets were the first to coin the term 'Facebook Revolutions' to describe the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings."[40] Despite this strong endorsement of social media as the cause of revolution, it has been found that both Al Jazeera and CNN both only used social media style informal sources for less than 38% of their source information.[41] This surprisingly low number indicates that although social media played a role in providing information to mainstream media, the majority of source information came from traditional means. Many have been quick to note the importance that the mainstream media played in the Arab Spring, with some suggesting that the revolutions would not have been possible if Al Jazeera had not been in Egypt providing the world with live footage of the revolution.[42] If one accepts that Al Jazeera and other mainstream media played a critical role in broadcasting the nature of the revolution to the world, and given that social media made up only approximately one third of their source information, then the suggestion that this was a Facebook revolution cannot be accepted

[39]Xose Soengas, "The Role of the Internet and Social Networks in the Arab Uprisings – An Alternative to Official Press Censorship," *Scientific Journal of Media Education* 21, no. 41 (2013): 148.
[40]Maha Bashri, Sara Netzley, and Any Greiner, "Facebook revolutions: Transitions in the Arab world, transitions in media coverage? A comparative analysis of CNN and Al Jazeera English's online coverage of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions," *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 5, no. 1 (2012): 26.
[41]*Ibid*.
[42]*Ibid*., 20.

in its entirety. This does not, however, suggest that social media did not play a contributing role to the revolution.

To dismiss the role of the mainstream media given the rise of social media would be a mistake. If social media had been the revolutionaries' so-called silver bullet, an effective mainstream media engagement plan would not have been necessary. However, some protestors "have spoken with regret about an early tactical mistake in their uprising: the failure to counter the influential role of state-run television…"[43] This over-reliance or over-anticipation of the benefit of social media was corrected by the revolutionaries through their subsequent effective engagement with mainstream media. In particular, one programme anchor, Mona el-Shazly hosted Wael Ghonim on her programme, despite pressure from the government to minimize the effects of the ongoing protests.[44] This interesting melding of a social media activist and mainstream media shows that the two media are complementary. To be successful, one must often harness the utility of the other. By themselves, neither would have the synergetic influence that they have when combined. The New York Times has gone so far as to say that Ms. el-Shazly's programme with Mr. Ghonim "appeared to undercut two weeks of relentless state propaganda and inject new vigor into a protest movement that some supporters feared had begun to wane."[45] This shows that although important, social media was but one tool that the revolutionaries used to achieve their momentous success.

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[43]Kareem Fahim and Mona El-Naggar, "Emotions of a Reluctant Hero Galvanize Protestors," *The New York Times*, 8 February, 2011.
[44]*Ibid.*
[45]*Ibid.*

Until this point in the paper, the role of social media on Egypt's Arab Spring has been examined in the context of events or issues of an active nature. That is to say, things that occurred. Although an important tool in assisting the revolutionaries, it has already been shown that social media was only one tool in a tool box of many effective strategies and actions. When examining the Arab Spring in Egypt, however, of equal importance to what happened, is what did not happen. During the Arab Spring, the Egyptian Army took a passive role and did not crack down on protestors. If the Army had cracked down, the outcome of the revolution would likely have been very different. One needs to look no further than Bahrain to see a practical example of this. Bahrain's Arab Spring protests were organised through social media,[46] but the revolution failed due to the crackdown of both Bahrain's Army and the influx of Saudi troops to help quell the developing revolution.[47]

If the Egyptian Army had moved to stop the protests in Egypt, it is likely that there would have been many more dead and injured. Instead, the Army allowed the people's will to be expressed. This is likely due, at least in part, to the fact that the protests, in general, were peaceful. Throughout the Arab Spring, the demonstrators showed "incredible discipline: [through] their sustained nonviolence, their refusal to be provoked by thugs and saboteurs, [and] their capacity to police themselves…"[48] By acting in a peaceful nature, the Army was not compelled or provoked into taking action to quell the revolution.

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[46]Mamoun Benmamoun, Morris Kalliny, and Robert A. Cropf, "The Arab Spring, MNEs, and virtual public spheres," *Multinational Business Review* 20, no. 1 (2012): 29.

[47]Derya Gocer Akder, "Theories of Revolutions and Arab Uprisings: The Lessons from the Middle East," *Ortadogu Etutleri* 4, no. 2 (January 2013): 88.

[48]Lisa Anderson, "Demystifying that Arab Spring…", 2.

In actuality, the Army took an extremely progressive role in the revolution. Not only did soldiers stay on the sidelines and allow the protests to continue, they also actively advertised that they would not intervene. An issued Army statement indicated "'Your armed forces, acknowledging the legitimate rights of the people,' stress that 'they have not and will not use force against the Egyptian people.'"[49] It is clear through this stance that the Egyptian Army understood the potential gravity of their actions if they attempted to move against the protestors.

Some question why the Army took a passive role during the Arab Spring. Xiaolin Zhuo, writing in Peace Magazine, has suggested that one of the reasons why the Army did not act was because it received considerable funding from the United States, and the United States supported the actions of the protestors.[50] Derya Gocer Akder furthers this view and posits that it was a combination of restraint by the protestors as well as the United States' backing of the Egyptian Army vice Mubarak[51] that contributed to a successful outcome for the revolutionaries. This suggests that the Army's passive role was due to international funding and pressure, which may have played a very significant role in leading to a successful revolution. If this assertion is true, it disproves the theory that social media was the cause of success for Egyptian revolutionaries.

This section has shown that during the height of the Arab Spring, the presence and importance of social media manifested itself it different ways. It proved to be an important tool for those who were connected to the internet in the organisation of

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[49] Newspaper Article. "Protestors flood Egypt streets…".

[50] Xiaolin Zhuo, "Egypt: The First Internet Revolt?," *Peace Magazine* 27, no. 3 (July-September 2011): 8.

[51] Derya Gocer Akder, "Theories of Revolutions and Arab Uprisings…", 99.

protests, but may not have been as powerful as first thought when one considers the limited numbers of online Egyptians, as well as the relative power of traditional nodes of communication such as mosques. Social media often times played a complementary role with mainstream media, but again, the importance of social media may have been overplayed as both CNN and Al Jazeera until used social media sourcing as a minority percentage of their source information. Additionally, the revolutionaries' realization that mainstream media still played a critical role in the revolution highlights the fact that social media was not a cure-all for the modern day revolutionary. Finally, this section has showed that the importance of the Egyptian Army's decision to not take action against the protestors must not be under-estimated. Regardless of the motivation, the Army's inaction provided the winning conditions for the revolutionaries. If the Army had cracked down on protestors, the revolution may have turned out differently as in Bahrain where a highly tech-savvy revolution was stopped by military action.

CONCLUSION

The advent of new technologies can significantly impact the ways in which events unfold. Social media, a relatively new entity on the world stage, has in many ways affected the way in which people interact with each other. The Arab Spring spread through the MENA region with varying degrees of success and provided a venue for the use of social media in revolutions. Much of the successes of the Arab Spring has been attributed by various scholars to the power of social media.

This paper has demonstrated that although an important tool for revolutionaries, social media by itself did not cause the successful revolution in Egypt's Arab Spring. Egypt was in many ways ready for revolution. Prior to the revolution, the declining quality of life in Egypt, combined with a youth bulge provided a popular sentiment that the time for change was near. Whether through President Obama's address at the University of Cairo, the outrage over the beating death of Khaled Said, or the portrayal of a better Egypt in pop culture, indications were that Egypt was ready for a fundamental shift in government. Social media provided a means to share ideas and focus disdain with Hosni Mubarak's regime, but it was the desire and will of the people that eventually brought about change. During the revolution, although social media was important in organizing protests, the traditional means of spreading information through word of mouth cannot be discounted. Similarly, it is too early to announce the death of mainstream media and its role in affecting change. Notwithstanding the impact that social media did have, a critical reason why Egypt's Arab Spring succeeded where Bahrain's failed was the fact that the Egyptian Army did not take action against the protestors. A powerful crack-down by the Army would have very likely mired, if not thwarted the rapid and successful revolution in Egypt. Given these factors, it is possible to conclude that social media was an important tool used by revolutionaries in Egypt during the Arab Spring, but it was not the sole reason why the revolution succeeded.

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