

# Sample research paper on role of social media in mobilization: a case study of eg...

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



## **Introduction**

The rise of the Spring Revolution in Egypt marked a new discussion of the role that social media has played in creating political and social mobilization. Until then, the use of social media was entirely described as bringing people from different parts of the world together to socialize and update one another on the various cultural and social activities around them. Social media is the current social trend that almost every person is using to get keep up with the current events and also interact with friends and families. However, after the 2011 protests in most Middle East and North Africa countries particularly Egypt and Tunisia, academics researchers and analysts have contemplated on how social media contributed to mass protests and strikes that were well organized to the extent of overpowering the ruling regime. News headlines from international media such as CNN and BBC read that ' Facebook and Twitter helps Egyptians regain democracy' among other headlines, an issue that had made most social science and political researchers doubt the particular role that social media contributed in the protests. According to social and political analysts and media reporters, social networks such as Facebook and twitter were highly used to provide information and persuade individuals to participate in certain activities as seen in the Arab Spring Revolution of 2011.

This calls for a need to look deeper into both the positive and negative roles that social media played in mobilizing a community in relation to the use of social media during the Arab spring Revolution in Egypt. This will be achieved by first unfolding how activists initially came up with the idea of using social media particularly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in mobilizing

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protesters and humanitarian supporters and informing the rest of the world on the need to support movement for democracy in Egypt. The paper also analyzes the application of various social theories as a way of understanding how people were able to organize and mobilize protesters through the use of social networks and also analyze some of the limitations of social media in community mobilization.

As a way of understanding the relationship between social media and mobilization, it is necessary to understand the meaning of these two controversial words. According to Castels (1996), and Passy and Marco (2001) mobilization is the act of assembling or bringing different people with a common goal together and preparing them for the core purpose. In this context, mobilization could mean sensitizing, coordinating and preparing the people who participated in political protests and rallies through pushing them to participate in protests and provision of necessary information and protests locations. On the other hand, Castels (1996) defines social media as a subsection of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) that allows online communication for the purpose of sharing information and ideas. In sociological point of view, social media creates online communities who interact and share ideas. Social media is therefore a tool that peoples with common interest also known as the community; uses organize and execute plans that concerns their well being and the well being of the society; a process that describes mobilization (Shah et al, 2005 and Schwarz, 2011). The similar situation was experienced in the Spring Revolution whereby a community of protesters whose main aim was to lobby for democracy in Egypt proved to be successful through social networks. Castels (1996)

asserts that social mobilization brings people together such as the military with the aim of achieving a common goal which is perceived to benefit the entire community and the society at large. Egypt protests and demonstrations was organized with a common goal of bringing down the authoritarian leadership experienced in the country and instead lobby for democracy that accommodates people's opinions and freedom.

### **What led to the increase in social media activism?**

The turn of social media in stimulating public demonstrations and peaceful rallies can be dated way back in 2008 spring when ' April 6 Youth Movement' Facebook page that was actively used during the 2011 protests was created. The main aim for the creation of this webpage was as a result of the planned strike by the El-Mahalla El-Kubra workers who were planning to go on strike on April 6th that year. This group became more active in 2011 whereby it played the role of informing the protesters what to wear during the public rallies and where to meet (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). The group also, in addition to blogs, twitter and Flickr acted as a public forum where different people, both the youth and educated citizens posted their views and concerns for the need to restore democracy in Egypt. This included the existing political activists and other people who had not been politically active

The second Facebook group ' We Are All Khaled Saeed' was the second largest Facebook group that was created to mobilize people to protest against the killing of Khaled Saeed by the police officers (USSF, 2011). Created by a Google executive, this group attracted the attention of

thousands of protestors who claimed that they had become tired of social injustices that was rampantly experienced by the Egyptian citizens who dared to speak of the political evils facing the country (USSF, 2011). Mobilization through this group was strengthened by the presence of two other group administrators who were underground political activists mobilizing the public to publicly protest as a way of condemning the regime that had turned the country into authoritarian ruling filled with torture of innocent citizens and control of political power by a specific group of people. One of the celebrated activists in using social media to encourage protest is a female admin of ' We Are All Khaled Saeed' groups who posted a live video encouraging the followers of group to meet at Tahir Square for a live protest demanding for democracy (USSF, 2011). The followers later shared and tweeted on the information to their friends hence creating a mass awareness and participation of thousands of people for the protest that occurred few days after this post. This according to Aljazeera English (2011) was one of the main protests that attracted a large number of protesters in Egypt. From the evidence of social media use in the above two example we ask ourselves how did the use of social media result in mass protest and active participation of this community who were lobbying for democracy as a result of bad ruling that had undermined the society?

### **Social theories and community mobilization**

The role of social media in bringing different people together despite the lack of physical contacts and knowhow can be better understood through evaluation of sociological theories of communication. Laswell's functionality

theory of communication which tries to answer a complex question “ who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?” can be used to explain why social media was heavily useful in mobilizing the protesters during the Egypt uprising. According to Laswell, the person disseminating the information, contents of such information and the target audience are the key measures of mobilization (Passy and Marco, 2001).. In this case, the activists who were concerned on the need to bring democracy and change in the current ruling that demoralized the people were able to mobilize the citizens who shared the same belief into participating in mass protests that were set to begin in Tahrir Square.

Network theory is another form of sociological model that can be used to elaborate the use of social media networking in mobilization. According to this theory, interpersonal ties or networks between different individuals with a common interest are likely to motivate the members of these networks to participate in a collective action such as protest and activism (Polat, 2005). According to Castels (1996), social networks are also characterized with forming strong ties with individuals and sharing information that is likely to influence the decision making process of the network members.

In addition, this theory indicates that a person is more likely to participate in a protest if one or more individuals who are member of the same informal network are participating. In this case, social media groups formed in social sites such as Facebook and twitter were used to actively recruit different individuals. As a result this led to formation of social network that was capable of motivating the members to participate in the protest through adequately providing them with necessary information concerning the need

to lobby for democracy and demonstrations locations among other factors. Granoveter's network theory of weak ties (1973) further illustrates the strength of weak ties in spreading information and mobilizing people with weak ties to participate in a common core. According to his theory, if information is shared only amongst people with strong ties for instance friends and families, it is likely that few people will get to know the contents of such information. In contrast, if such information is shared to people with weak ties especially through the use of social media where people are only connected through a social site, it is likely that the people from different regions will get the information and are likely to react to its contents (Hargittai, 2007).

This is the similar case seen in Egypt uprising whereby if the activist only shared their desire to lobby for democracy with only close friends and families (people with strong ties), then very few people would have shown up for the protests. However through the use of weak ties created by social networks, several people with no close ties got the information and responded to the need to protest for democracy and change and hence the reason for mass protest on the streets of major cities on February 2011.

## **Role of Social Media in Egypt Spring Revolution**

The active role of social media in the community can be described as the channel of online communication that the society has adopted in the recent past. This is due to the minimum costs involved to communicate and share important and general information, educate the society and bring change to the society. As a way of understanding how social media in Egypt uprising,

an analysis of tweets, journal articles and scholarly analysis on the previous reviews on the same will be analyzed in this section.

- Social media as a interaction channel

People from different regions in the country and globally relied heavily on social sites to post their views on the suffering of the citizens of Egypt. This was mainly because interactions through social sites such as twitter and Facebook accommodated large groups of people to interact at minimum cost as compare to other interaction channels such as telephone and face to face form of interaction. This as a result created a social forum for people with one core objective to interact freely, share their opinions and plan on the ways they would push for the resignation of the regime leaders.

- As an alternative media and source of information

Media houses such as radios and televisions and print media were restricted from publishing certain information concerning the government or armed forces as they feared the possible consequences during the Mubarak regime (Bhuiyan, 2012). This as a result prohibited protesters and the general public to know what was happening in Egypt before and during the uprising. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube on the other hand has little restriction to join, post updates and streaming audio and video recordings to the public (Polat, 2005). Since the public media was restricted to what they published and broadcasted, social media assumed the role of alternative media to update the protesters, Egyptians and the rest of the world on what was happening in Egypt.

This with the help of international media houses such as BBC and CNN who relied heavily on social media to get breaking news on the Egypt uprising



kept the whole world updated and the extent to which demonstrators were willing to go in order to achieve democracy. Social media particularly Facebook and YouTube users in the region uploaded live videos and images of the demonstrators portraying their bravery including the extent of risking their life while persevering the pain of tear gas and live bullets that were used on protesters (Eltantawy, N. & Wiest, 2011, and Bhuiyan, 2012). This as a result made various international humanitarian organizations and countries such as the United States to lobby for the needs of the demonstrators to be adhered to hence leading to resignation of Mubarak after eighteen days of active protests.

- As a tool for sensitizing community participation

Compared to other Arab uprisings particularly in Libya and Tunisia that took over twenty eight days and more than nine months respectively to overthrow the regime, Egypt uprising only took eighteen days to overthrow the regime of Mubarak. This was due to the presence of social networks where rallies and protests were planned and executed through constant sensitization of the community to go to the streets and protest for political change. Social site users were also encouraged to share the tweets and updates to their friends and followers as a way of sensitizing all the people to participate in protests, regardless of whether they were politically active and inactive and regardless of their age and sociopolitical views. Activists such as Ghonim the admin of We Are All Khaled Saeed group and his colleagues used Facebook and twitter networks to organize and post messages hence motivating individuals with shared interest to come up and fight for the rights of the society which had been undermined by political regimes that used torture

and authoritarian rule in distribution of resources particularly for their own power benefits.

## **Limitations of social media use in mobilizing the community in relation to the Egypt Spring revolution**

The role played by the activists to ensure that as many people as possible received information through social sites such as Facebook and twitter was fruitful to some extent. However, not all the people who received the message participated in the actual demonstrations on February 2011.

According to a research conducted by the United States Defense Advance Research Projects Agency (DAPRA, 2009) on the Red Ballon Challenge, the extent of use of social media in mobilizing a community into carrying out a particular task depend on the actual passive recruits who are not only willing to mobilize their close friends and families but are also willing to participate in the protest (Hargittai, 2007, Castels, 1996 and Polat, 2005). This is a limiting factor in the social network which has weak ties and thus building trust for the people to become passive in a particular task is hard (Sarfraz, 2013). As a result, it is evident that not all those who received information over the social sites were willing to participate in the actual protest.

Another limitation is the existence of some members of the community who do not have access to the social media use. According to the USSF data (2011), only 10 percent of Egyptians had joined Facebook and although the number of subscribers increased during the uprising, the extent to which people trust information from the social media is minimal. This is because social media is mostly associated with the youths mostly for gossips and sharing less serious information among friends.

Future of social media in community mobilization remains a controversial issue that requires a keen evaluation on its role in bringing the society together towards a common agenda. The use of social networks in the modern society has made mobilization more effective hence bringing the community together in an attempt to achieve a common goal. As seen in the role played by social in mobilization of protesters in Egypt during the 2011 Arab Spring Revolution, it is evident that social networks plays a vital role in bringing the community together especially in a call for change in politics. However it can be argued that social networking has enabled society to share common ideas and grievances and collectively lobby for changes that benefits the society. Further research could however be useful in determining the influence and relationship between social networks and political activists and organizations as well as how organizations use social media in influencing offline activities in the society.

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