

Social media and the egyptian revolution

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



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January 2011 marked the beginning of peaceful protests and movement demonstrations staged by citizens throughout Egypt. Movement actors fought for democratic advances, political freedoms and equality. The genuine commitment for change, the unity of the people and most notably the tactful manipulation of social media resulted in the disposition of the suppressive regime. Modern social media has significantly changed the traditional forms of activism and has simplified the efforts needed to provoke civic mobilization.

Social media applications such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube hold the dynamic power to manipulate, control, inform and motivate. Essentially, they have become excellent tools for activists. This paper seeks to describe and assess specifically the relationship between social media and the Egyptian Revolution. Building on this foundation, this essay will prove that social media platforms were the major catalysts for social change in Egypt. To begin, social media, or more precisely Twitter and Facebook, defined and formed the movement's collective identity.

These platforms represented safe environments that permitted individuals to consult about common grievances and share revolutionary ideas (Comunello & Anzera, 2012; 466). Furthermore, social media applications played key roles in facilitating the efforts needed for communication, organization, and recruitment (ibid). These applications were highly trusted as they allowed activists to network effortlessly and moreover, assisted in turning rational individuals into constituents. Lastly, social media aided in attracting global support and 'helped spread democratic ideas across international borders' (Comunello & Anzera, 2012; 466).

By referencing the works of scholars such as Kenneth Pollack, Halim Rane and Francesca Communello, this paper will prove social media as the underlying force of the Egyptian revolution. To begin, the conversations held on Facebook and Twitter shaped the collective identity that would make 'individuals feel capable of effecting change' (Staggenborg, 2008; 191). Twitter and Facebook were the underlying catalytic forces of the movement as they provided a space that would allow Egyptians to publically aspire for changes and 'express opposition to the existing order' (Doran, 2011; 41).

" We Are All Khaled Said" was a Facebook page that established Khaled Said's death as the spark of the Egyptian movement. With Said's brutally beaten face as the banner, this page quickly spurred anger as it emphasized both the unreasonable level of cruelty that was exerted towards him and as well as the oppression Egyptians faced daily. Remarkably over the course of a few weeks, half a million Egyptians were on Facebook, expressing their anger and sharing their grievances over police brutality, rising food prices and corruption.

This platform page assisted in framing the movement " in terms of demands for dignity, justice, freedom and democracy" (Rane et al, 2012; 80). The establishment of the movement's frame gave rise to many other Facebook pages. These highlighted the corrupted practices of the government and educated both constituents and adherents to the movement about democracy and its benefits. Facebook succeeded in breaking down the psychological fear barrier that obstructed Egyptians from participating.

Once fear was no longer an issue, the Egyptian social capital progressed intensively as the collective consciousness emerged. Facebook was used as

a mobilization structure that would undeniably give back the power to the people and restore their self esteem. Correspondingly, Tunisia's success in toppling their dictator, had inspired a wave of revolutions in the Middle-East. Socio-political debates and ideas of democratic advances in Egypt were highly influenced by the current events in Tunisia. These influences had left a marginal impact on the Egyptian collective identity.

By using social media platforms, Tunisian activists guided their Egyptian counterparts regarding the matters of revolution. On Facebook, Tunisians inspired Egyptians by further highlighting the benefits of democratic advancements and by providing words of encouragement and advice (Rane & Salem, 2012; 85). Tunisians contributed to the empowerment and collective morale of the Egyptian people entirely through the use of social networking applications. Social media is what ultimately allowed the Egyptian people to be galvanized.

It created a type of common room that allowed dissidents to speak freely which gave emergence to the movements collective action frame and identity. As Twitter and Facebook were deduced as safe and anonymous environments, the psychological fear barrier had eventually been broken, thus supporting the thesis that social media was undeniably a prominent feature in the outcome in Egypt. (Rane & Salem, 2012; 84) In addition, Twitter and Facebook had facilitated the movement's needed efforts for mobilization.

Activists used these platforms as reliable tools to propagate their message and contact fellow movement actors. Both Twitter and Facebook contain features that allow statements to be liked, shared or quoted; therefore

breaking down all geographical barriers. Egyptian activists, while by passing government restrictions, would use these applications to strategically organize peaceful protests and other forms of collective activities and events. Movement actors would organize ways to contest authorities on Twitter or Facebook as they knew their great power to spread news (Idle and Nunns, 2011, p. 20).

Specifically, Twitter played a key role during the revolution as it held the power to potentially turn a simple tweet into a worldwide trending topic. Similarly to the diffusion theory, Twitter along with Facebook became key channels of diffusion. Both these applications accelerated the speed at which the adopters received the innovations initiated by the transmitters, resulting in the instantaneous mobilization of individuals and resources (Rane & Salem, 2012; 78). The pertinent example of this phenomenon presents itself a few days prior to the massive revolutionary demonstrations of January 25.

To avoid attracting authorities, main organizers of this uprising had avoided disclosing details too early. When details were finally shared, it diffused virally over social media applications at an impeccable speed that would attract 80, 000 protestors in two days, thus proving social media as a prominent inciting force. Social media was used to raise expectations of success and coordinate strategy (Howard et al. 2011; 9). These networks were manipulated in ways that would inspire "dissidents to organize protests, criticize their governments and spread ideas about democracy" (ibid).

Twitter and Facebook supported Egyptian activists by sustaining collective action and by facilitating the process of diffusion (Rane & Salem, 2012; 90).

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To deduce, social media simplified the dynamics needed to provoke the mobilization of the Egyptian social movement, thus supporting the thesis that Twitter and Facebook were the catalysts to the movement. Lastly, social media platforms galvanized foreign support and "helped to globally spread voices against [oppressive] regimes" factors that contributed to the movement's success (Comunello & Anzera, 2012; 466).

As previously mentioned, social media networks had broken down the geographical barriers that would otherwise limit activists. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube disseminated images and videos of police brutality towards the relatively peaceful protestors; which heightened awareness in countries. Activists used these platforms in their favour to gain international support, thus weakening the oppressive regime. Simply put, the more Egyptians attracted awareness, the more likely Mubarak would fall.

Specifically, Egyptians directed these images to Western countries as they recognized that added pressures from these States was paramount (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). An important speech permitted Egyptian movement actors had known of their success days before Mubarak had actually resigned. When Obama publically stated his discontentment with the Egyptian government's abuse of power, there was a cry of victory in all of Egypt. The Leader of the Free World's statement had rekindled the fire of passion and had empowered Egyptians, inspiring them to continue their pursue for change.

Moreover, similarly to the Tunisian Revolution, the Egyptian Revolution had sparked movements throughout the Middle East. Countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region share many common elements, thus

explaining the wave of uprisings (Rane & Salem, 2012; 84). The Egyptian movement was merely a response to a lack of human rights and freedoms and its success, motivated all pro-democratic activists in the MENA region. These activists learned of the power of social media by following the Egyptian movement on Twitter and Facebook.

In hoping to rid their countries from "adverse social, economic and political situation", activists look at social media platforms as the initiators for change (ibid).. Consequently, current oppressive governments in the Middle East have taken example from the failures of the Egyptian and Tunisian governments and "have been subjected to a new level of scrutiny" (Doran, 2011; 43). In Syria, the authoritative government has been behaving with great brutality in response to mobilization efforts. Assad has ruthlessly killed many of the rioting individuals all while censoring the media, in efforts of shielding 'himself from foreign audit' (ibid).

The social media tactics used by Egyptian and Tunisian activists have weakened their respective government all while strengthening other authoritarian governments in the region. Twitter and Facebook supported Egypt during its plight for social change as they assisted activists in raising international awareness. Because of their abilities to cascade information virally with no geographical limits, the Egyptian Revolution became an international topic in a matter of weeks; ultimately leading to the movements success.

Lastly, social media aided with spreading ideas of revolution and democracy in the MENA region (Rane & Salem, 2012; 84). The diffusion of Egypt's success on Facebook and Twitter, inspired pro-democratic movements

throughout the Middle East; thus supporting the statement that social media was the seminal impulse for social change in Egypt and as well as the rest of the Middle East. " The best practical reason to think that social media can help bring political change is that both dissidents and governments think they can" C. Shirky (Comunello & Anzera, 2012; 461).

The Egyptian Revolution and the contributory role played by Twitter and Facebook demonstrate the predominant effect social media platforms have on social movements. The achievement of the movements objectives didn't solely depend on social media; offline efforts were required. Nevertheless, Twitter and Facebook were the major driving forces of the movement as they accelerated the movement's progression towards success. To begin, these social media applications shaped the collective action frame and defined the collective identity, ultimately leading to the mobilization of the movement.

Furthermore, these platforms facilitated communicational efforts and the transfer of pertinent information thus simplifying all the dynamics involved with mobilization. Lastly, Twitter and Facebook helped in the spreading of democratic ideas and attracted the international awareness needed that would essentially overthrow the Mubarak regime. Considering these statements aforementioned, it is extremely likely that without these social media platforms, the revolution would have evolved at a much slower pace, therefore proving that these platforms were verily major catalysts for social change in Egypt.