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**The role of Facebook and Twitter in generating
social and political change during
The Arab ‘spring’ Uprisings of
Tunisia and Egypt**

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Abstract

The ‘Arab Spring’ refers to the protests and revolutions that spread across a number of Middle Eastern and North African Muslim countries during late 2010/early 2011. Grounded on the main theoretical framework of the public sphere (along with the complementary theories of technological determinism and technical and cultural appropriation) the aim of this research was to investigate the role of Facebook and Twitter in generating social and political change during the Arab ‘spring’ uprisings of Tunisia and Egypt. Findings from a series of semi-structured interviews with key individuals in both countries offer some support for the validity of these three theories by suggesting that social media worked as an effective public sphere for activism, as well as being a communicative/organisational tool that generated some social/political changes.

Nonetheless, this research suggests that the effectiveness of social media began to wane very early into the uprisings. Although this weakening was relatively slow in the more secular Tunisia where the highly westernised youth continued to use social media as a public sphere to discuss political issues, the speed of its demise was far more rapid in the more Islamic Egypt where the traditional public sphere (especially the mosques) and face-to-face communication became more important in driving on the uprising. This implies that although social media played an important role in helping to generate the uprisings in 2010/2011 and in helping to bring some social and political changes, it is not particularly effective in the long-run following regime repression, violence, and media censorship.

Key words: Arab Spring, Facebook, Twitter, social, political, Tunisia, Egypt, qualitative research, semi-structured interviews, theory of the public sphere, theory of technological determinism

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INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: The Arab World (North Africa & the Middle East)

Source: usarab.com

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

The ‘Arab Spring’ refers to the protests and revolutions that have spread across a number of Middle Eastern and North African Muslim countries since late 2010. Initially, these uprisings began in Tunisia on 18th December 2010, after Mohamed Bouazizi had set himself on fire and then died from his injuries. He had been a distraught market trader whose extreme actions stemmed from his daily struggles against poverty and the state’s political authoritarianism, oppression of human rights and severe corruption. Yet the protests calling for political reform (which suddenly broke out across Tunisia) also triggered similar demonstrations in other authoritarian countries, such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman.

However, although the scale, ferocity and success of these different rebellions have varied greatly from country to country, many writers have emphasized the perceived influence of social media in generating, explaining and sustaining some of these uprisings. Generally, it has been argued by writers such as Shirky (2011) and Castells (2012) that social media functions as both a public sphere and as a communicative/organisational tool. They claim it has been influential in spreading ideas of freedom and democracy to the people, motivating them to take their protests onto the streets, assisting in the planning and organisation of demonstrations, communicating the truth to the outside world, and contributing to the generation of social and political change (Shirky 2011; Castells 2012).

Therefore, bearing these claims in mind, it is the purpose of this research to investigate the role of social media in generating social and political change during the Arab Uprisings. This means that it will also be necessary to examine a variety of alternative views, including those of critics such as Gladwell (2011) and Morozov (2011). This will then provide a balance to the research as such authors are sceptical of social media's potential for generating social and political change. For example, they argue that social media cannot function as an effective public sphere or communicative/organisational tool due to regime monitoring, censorship and violent oppression (Gladwell 2011; Morozov 2011).

Given the sheer scale of the uprisings across so many Arab countries, it was necessary to restrict this research to a small number of countries for investigation. Therefore, Tunisia and Egypt were selected due to a variety of important reasons. For instance, these two countries were the first to have uprisings and both were 'successful' in forcing out their authoritarian presidents. Also, in relation to other

Arab countries, these two are significant in terms of their economic and political importance. Finally, the uprisings in these two countries ‘developed’ in different ways, and so this provides us with a range of possible outcomes for consideration. For instance, the first Arab uprising occurred in Tunisia, and it developed relatively quickly. The protests started in December 2010 (following the death of Bouazizi) and, within a couple of months, the dictator Ben Ali had fled the country following decades in power and Tunisia was on course for free, fair elections. Thereafter, the uprising spread to Egypt by January 2011. Again, after decades in power, the dictator (Hosni Mubarak) was forced from power in February 2011 (following a number of violent demonstrations) and election processes were being put into place by March 2011. Protests and revolutions then started in many other authoritarian Arab countries.

It should also be noted that it is impractical to attempt an investigation of an extensive range of media. Instead this research will focus on the social networking sites of Facebook and Twitter because these platforms were utilised during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings; with users producing and/or sharing digital text, pictures, videos, audio files and applications. In addition, the increasing use of mobile phones with social media access was also an important development during this period. Hence, although Facebook and Twitter were not the only social media used by activists during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, they have been selected here because of their perceived importance by many activists and authors. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the term ‘social media’ will be used only in reference to Facebook and Twitter.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This research aimed to carry out a detailed investigation into the role of Facebook and Twitter in generating social and political change during the Arab ‘spring’ uprisings of Tunisia and Egypt. These aims were met by fulfilling the following objectives:

OBJECTIVE 1: Establish a theoretical framework for the project. A critical review of the literature allowed the identification of two key contributions, which have the potential to offer an in-depth understanding of the role played by social media during the Arab Spring: the theory of the Public Sphere and the theory of Technological Determinism. This was then followed by an in depth analysis of these contributions, where the main arguments (supporting, challenging or problematizing their application in the specific context of the Arab Spring) were reviewed critically. This allowed the composition of a solid background against which the study was designed, conducted and interpreted.

OBJECTIVE 2: To develop the research paradigm to be followed in the project. This included a review of the methodological approaches and a critical evaluation of their suitability for the stated purpose. This then led to the implementation of a systematic review of available literature on the content of social media posts during the uprisings, as well as a series of structured interviews as the method selected for this project.

OBJECTIVE 3: To gain an in depth understanding of the social and political context of the Arab uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. This includes a review of the recent history of media development in Tunisia and Egypt, state policies

regarding the monitoring and censorship of social media, and an overview of the events of the uprisings in these two countries.

OBJECTIVE 4: To identify key contributions emerging from the interview data. This entailed an in-depth thematic analysis of the interview material in light of the theoretical framework established in Objective 1.

OBJECTIVE 5: Contextualising the findings. Bearing in mind that this research is embedded within the specific cultural context of Tunisia and Egypt, the final phase of the project considered the findings in light of the current situation of these two countries. This allowed the researcher to critically evaluate the project's contribution and to formulate recommendations for future research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research was based upon the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent did social media provide Tunisians and Egyptians with an effective public sphere for generating social and political change during the uprisings in these two countries?
- 2) How important was social media as an organisational and communications tool for Tunisians and Egyptians during the uprisings in these two countries?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In attempting to understand the role of social media during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, authors such as Castells (2012) have emphasised the role of

social media (as both a public sphere and as a communications/organisational tool) for starting, explaining and sustaining these uprisings. The implication is that any social and political changes generated from the uprisings are the direct or indirect result of social media activism (Castells, 2012). On the other hand, sceptics, including Morozov (2011), argue that the role of social media in helping to generate social/political changes from such events was non-existent or minimal at best. Thus, the multiplicity of such widely divergent opinions suggests there is a need for a comprehensive study in order to help clarify these contradictions within the current literature.

Furthermore, existing research has tended to offer insufficient understanding of the role played by the traditional public sphere during the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. Bearing in mind these are both overwhelmingly Muslim majority countries, where a significant proportion of the population attend the mosques each week, new research is required that takes adequate account of this traditional public sphere dominated by the mosques. Additionally, as an Arab Muslim, this researcher is further aware that the traditional public spheres of coffee shops and sheesha (smoking) bars should also be included in new research. In other words, this thesis aims to fill these research gaps by conducting a detailed study to clarify the role of social media during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Yet the effectiveness of this role (as a potential public sphere and communicational/organisational tool for generating social and political change) is also examined in relation to the traditional public sphere.

In addition, this will be an investigation that is theoretically framed by the theories of the public sphere (Habermas, 1984) and of soft view technological determinism

(Smith and Marx, 1994). The theory of the public sphere will assist in understanding the role of social media as a potential public sphere during the two uprisings. The theory of soft view technological determinism, as enhanced by the theory of technological and cultural appropriation (Flew and Cunningham, 2010; Lindtner et al., 2012), will assist in understanding the potential role of social media as a new media tool for generating social and political change.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PUBLIC SPHERE

1.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER ONE

The purpose of this first chapter is to attain a better understanding of the role of social media during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, which will be achieved by reviewing the relevant literature and setting out a theoretical framework to guide the research of this thesis. The main theory to be adopted is the theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1984; 1991; 2006) and this will firstly be considered by critically reviewing the theory as well as its application to social media. This critical review will include an examination of both supporters and opponents of the idea that social media are a public sphere, with the theoretical approach being further enriched by considering the implications of technological determinism. However, whereas the public sphere will be discussed in chapter one, technological determinism will be reviewed in the following chapter.

Included within this establishment of the theoretical framework, there will be a discussion of a range of relevant empirical studies. Combining both theoretical approaches and empirical support will allow a comprehensive evaluation of the state of the art understanding of the role of social media in the public sphere. Importantly, the various perspectives will assist the researcher later during the analysis. This is because it is during the analysis that the findings generated from the research methodology will be related to this literature review as a means of testing the validity of the different authors' claims.

With respect to the sequencing of this chapter, the theory of the public sphere will initially be reviewed in the first section. This is where the argument that social media is a public sphere will be divided into the sub-sections of supporters, opponents and others. Thereafter, a final public sphere sub-section will examine literature specifically related to social media as a public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Finally, there will be a conclusion to this chapter where the main issues will be summarised.

1.1 THE PUBLIC SPHERE

1.1.1 THE THEORY OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

1.1.1.2. Defining the public sphere

The public sphere has been described by DeLuca and Peeples (2002, p.128) as follows:

‘Ideally the public sphere denotes a social space wherein private citizens gather as a public body with the rights of assembly, association, and expression in order to form public opinion. The public sphere mediates between civil society and the state, with the expression of public opinion working to both legitimate and check the power of the state.’

In other words, the theoretically ideal public sphere is a forum or an environment where people can come together in order to discuss and to debate issues of public concern. In addition, these conversations should be open and free in order to hold the government accountable to the wishes of the population. Likewise, Fraser (1990, p. 57) says of the public sphere:

‘It designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state.’

Therefore, Fraser (1990) re-iterates the idea that the public sphere is a space where citizens may discuss public issues of common concern. However, in order that the government be held accountable to the wishes of the population, Fraser (1990) further emphasises that the public sphere needs to be separate from the state so that it can function openly, freely and independently. Kluge and Hansen (2016) explain that the public sphere users should seek to arrive at a common and agreed outcome following their discussions. This includes suggestions and solutions for social and political issues, which implies that the policies and the laws (which are established by the government) should be influenced by the public sphere because the members of the government take into consideration the opinions of the public sphere users (Arendt, 1958).

1.1.1.3. The theory of the public sphere by Habermas

Critically influential in developing the theory of the public sphere are the works of Habermas (1984; 1991; 2006), and it is this theory that forms the theoretical guide to this thesis. In particular, Habermas (1984; 1991; 2006) claimed that social and political change could be generated through the public sphere. His argument was that new media technology (as first demonstrated by the invention of the printed press) produces a new public sphere, and that the increased political and social

discussions/debates via this new forum, will then lead to the generation of social and political change through the increased public awareness of such issues.

‘...the public sphere as a realm of freedom and permanence. Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all. In the discussion among citizens issues were made topical and took on shape. In the competition among equals the best excelled and gained their essence - the immortality of fame’ (Habermas, 1991, p. 4)

Therefore, according to Habermas, the mechanism for generating social/political change lay in the rational debate and discussion of political issues via the public sphere. In particular, however, there must be a common interest in seeking the truth and a willingness to criticise. Interestingly, Habermas further argued that Western Europe’s public sphere reached its zenith in the early 19th century, due to the combination of a politically critical press and open debates across different societies, coffee shops and ale houses (Habermas, 1984; 1991). In addition, he also claimed that the public sphere was only accessible to middle class and upper class citizens, and not to women and the working class (Habermas, 1984; 1991).

More recently, with the rapidly increasing use of the Internet and social media, Habermas (2006) has argued that his concept of the public sphere does not apply to social media. Of course, it should be recognised that the development and utilisation of Facebook and Twitter were still in their relative infancy at the time of these claims by Habermas (2006). Nonetheless, he stated that the powerful influences of the state and of mass-media professionals prevent social media from being an open, free forum where truly genuine political discussions can take place (Habermas, 2006). Therefore, in the following section, the theory of the public sphere will be examined

in detail and critically evaluated from the different perspectives of supporters, opponents and others.

1.1.2 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE: SUPPORTERS

1.1.2.1 Social media as an inter-connected forum for political discussions

There are various writers who, whilst offering constructive criticism of the view of social media as a public sphere, do see its potential. An example is Dahlgren (2005) who says that although it cannot be described as an ideal public sphere due to its lack of complete freedom and openness, social media possess various elements characteristic of a public sphere. In particular, social media offer a forum for public discussions, debates and interactions, elements typical of a public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005).

Dahlgren (2000) further maintains that the effectiveness of social media as a public sphere depends upon the evolutionary development of the political system. Social media operate more successfully as an open public sphere in the context of western democracies as opposed to authoritarian regimes (Dahlgren, 2000). The implication is that an authoritarian regime (such as a dictatorship) can be expected to influence and manipulate social media through policies such as censoring/monitoring. Dahlberg (2007) even argues that the governments and mainstream media within democratic societies can effectively promote their own dominant discourse through social media at the expense of opposition activists. However, although Dahlberg (2007) admits that such marginalisation of social movements and activists implies that social media is not fully functioning as a free and open public sphere, he does maintain that a diverse range of counter-discourse exists through social media.

Within the literature, there is also a final group of writers who conceptualise social media as a public sphere. For example, Lynch (2015) draws attention to the importance of citizen journalism, as well as to the interconnections between the different forms of media:

‘Facebook emerged as a key site for the nascent public sphere, with politically focused pages hosting regular, intense arguments and debates about ideas, identities, and strategies. Twitter would become another key outlet for citizen journalism and political discourse, especially in the Gulf. These social media should not be understood in isolation from the broader public sphere. They layered onto the proliferating print and broadcast media to constitute a dense, rich informational ecosystem offering multiple points of access for sustained engagement, the dissemination of ideas and information, and the negotiation of new narratives. Ideas, images, and networks moved easily across multiple platforms. Al Jazeera and other television stations broadcasted video footage disseminated by citizen journalists online. Popular online activists writing in English became key interlocutors for the international media. Stories published in newspapers or broadcast on the air drove online discussions’ (Lynch, 2015, p.334).

Lynch (2015) suggests that Facebook was effective as a public sphere (where lively political debates took place during the uprisings) and that Twitter was especially supportive in terms of citizen journalism. This is where citizen journalism took the form of ordinary people spreading news and information regarding the uprisings, as opposed to the traditional reporting via mainstream media outlets. However, Lynch (2015) stresses the valid point that the media should not be regarded as isolated,

separate entities because there are flows of communication backwards and forwards between all the various types of media. In other words, they are all inter-connected. Benkler (2006) is another who argues that a networked public sphere has emerged through the Internet and social media, with emphasis upon users becoming active participants and speakers rather than passive listeners and readers of traditional media. Therefore, it is claimed this new network can have a democratising effect because it grants citizens the opportunity to develop into the creators of political narratives instead of remaining as consumers and spectators (Benkler, 2006).

1.1.2.2 Social media develops from online to offline activism

It has been proposed by Papacharissi (2009) that social media, by providing a platform for online forms of activism, foster offline activism. Similarly, Shirky (2011) also sees a positive role for social media as a public sphere that can generate offline activism. Following in the footsteps of Habermas, he argues that social media have created a new public sphere where (Arab) people can now discuss ‘forbidden’ social and political issues (Shirky, 2011).

‘Access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation. Moreover, a public sphere is more likely to emerge in a society as a result of people’s dissatisfaction with matters of economics or day-to-day governance’ (Shirky, 2011, p.6).

Over time, Shirky suggests that these public sphere discussions on social media will have a persuading influence on people, causing them to ‘develop’ their opinions and attitudes. In particular, many will reach the general consensus that they desire (in terms of, for example, social/political freedom, human rights and democracy) and they will also be prepared to take action to achieve these because of the

encouragement they have received from other social media users. And so this new public sphere can eventually lead to widespread calls for social/political change that can transform into offline activism (Shirky, 2008; 2011). Therefore, an important link is claimed to exist because an online user/activist may become transformed into a 'real world' activist who takes physical action by participating in street protests. In other words, this implies that social media has the potential to create and develop an entire social movement.

1.1.2.3 Social media as a communicational/organisational tool for activism

In fact, this idea that social media has become a new public sphere has also been mentioned by others. For example, Petersen says social media has achieved this by linking individuals and communities together, even those who are separated by large geographical distances (Petersen, 2011). Furthermore, Shirky also emphasizes the role of social media in helping activists to raise awareness of their calls for freedom and democracy, by spreading their message to the masses of the general population. Videos and images of the 'truth' can also be sent to the outside world in order to counter any 'propaganda' from the regime. In addition, Shirky says that social media can be used both online and offline (such as mobile phone texting and tweeting) in order to assist in the planning and organising of protests. For example, the activists can use social media to give notification of the date, time and location of the next demonstration, with the aim of massing together as many people as possible (Shirky, 2011).

Overall, it is evident that Shirky believes that social media has become an important tool for today's activists and social movements, having a number of practical advantages and benefits. He also regards the development of this new public sphere

as being particularly beneficial in certain countries, i.e. those where Government sentiment is very strong. Indeed, it is interesting that Shirky claims that social media discussions in these countries can lead to public demonstrations. Indeed, the greatest threat to authoritarian regimes may be when social media causes people to protest on the streets in large numbers (Shirky, 2008; 2011). Therefore, these views of Shirky are directly relevant to the objectives of this research since his ultimate implication is that social media, through the stages and processes outlined above, can contribute significantly towards the generation of social and political change.

1.1.2.4. Social media can change opinions and encourage activism

Facebook and Twitter are generally regarded as being important for both initiating and sustaining an uprising, with emphasis given to their function as a means of persuading people to join the street protests. In addition, Shirky refers to other academic studies in an attempt to give support to his arguments. For example, he mentions the two-step flow theory of communication, which was first developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955. Katz and Lazarsfeld, in exploring the role played by people in the flow of mass communication, reached two fundamental conclusions. Firstly, the mass media alone had very little effect on changing peoples' political opinions. Secondly, the greater influence on peoples' opinions was exerted by people's regular interactions with their acquaintances. In other words, discussions with friends, family and work colleagues appear to be more influential than traditional mass media in changing peoples' opinions (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955, cited in Shirky, 2011). This suggests that discussions with friends and family on social media can also influence peoples' opinions. In this sense, social media may represent an opinion-changing public sphere as claimed by Shirky.

1.1.2.5. Social media activism cannot be stopped by authoritarian regimes

Shirky (2011) mentions a theory called the ‘conservative dilemma.’ This theory claims that dictators and regimes are now faced with a difficult situation. On the one hand, they know that the Internet and social media increase the possibility of free speech and could be used by activists to organise anti-regime demonstrations. Yet, on the other hand, they will still develop this new media because this process is crucial for the modernisation of their countries. Therefore, the ‘conservative dilemma’ is used by Shirky to suggest that any regime’s moves towards increased Internet and social media usage will inevitably develop this public sphere in such a country (Shirky, 2011). Thus, as previously explained, this could trigger the process of increased ‘open’ discussions, which could lead to more people being persuaded that freedom is worth fighting for. Eventually, street protests and demonstrations can become a real possibility.

Shirky also refers to the cute cat theory by Ethan Zuckerman. In this theory, Zuckerman claims that most social media users are involved in trivial activities, which he describes as ‘cute cats.’ However, if a regime shuts down these sites in order to stop political activists, then the people who lost their ‘cute cats’ will become angry. This suggests that such people will then become more politically-minded. They may become opponents of the regime and join forces with the protesters. Interestingly, therefore, Zuckerman is suggesting that trivia on social media can actually help the activists and regimes will have even more problems if they shut down these sites (Zuckerman, 2008). Therefore, in conclusion, Shirky sees social media as positively supporting activism and social/political change and uses theories,

such as the two step flow theory, conservative dilemma and cute cat theory, to strengthen his arguments.

1.1.2.6. Social media can start and sustain Uprisings

Shirky's (2011) analysis resonates with that of Castells (2012) who identifies Facebook and Twitter as the essential catalysts of numerous uprisings around the world, including those in Tunisia and Egypt. He claims that 'the precondition for the revolts was the existence of an Internet culture, made up of bloggers, social networks and cyber-activism' (Castells, 2012, p. 27). Therefore, Castells may be described as a hard view technological determinist because he claims that social media in particular (and the Internet in general) are generating uprisings that are bringing social and political change. Also, he makes these claims without any detailed references to other factors that might be contributing to these uprisings, such as authoritarianism, corruption, poverty, lack of human rights, and lack of economic opportunities. The implication is that the self-expressing communicative nature of social media (as a network linking users and activists together) makes this a technological tool so powerful that it brings revolutionary change that could not be achieved in its absence.

Importantly, Castells (2012) further argues that the social media networks are supported by a vast international group of Internet users, hackers, and technological experts who are capable of helping opposition activists to foil any regime's plans to monitor, censor, and shut down social media. He describes this assistance as critical because 'the most important obstacle that governments face when trying to shut off the Internet comes from the vigilance of the global Internet community' (Castells, 2012, p.62). Therefore, this suggests that such support offers social media a realistic

chance of becoming a highly effective, unstoppable new public sphere and communicative tool for the masses.

1.1.2.7. Social media bonds communities together and increases civic engagement

Various writers have discussed issues that echo aspects of Shirky's claims. For example, Bowman and Vela (2011) have highlighted social media's so-called bonding effect, where social media is claimed to bind communities closer together because users collaborate with one another in the creation and sharing of content. Furthermore, Bowman and Vela optimistically predict that this new public sphere can generate social/political change because of the improved civic engagement (Bowman & Vela, 2011). In other words, like Shirky, they see a positive potential for social media being used as a forum where citizens can be involved in the management of their communities. Social media users' civic engagement and community involvement has, according to these authors, the potential to generate social/political change.

Interestingly, Bowman and Vela have rejected the 'gessellschaft' concept of Tönnies (1887), the 'bowling alone' theory of Putnam (1995; 2000) and other such beliefs which regard urban communities as dense collections of people with mostly weak ties (weak social bonds) between them. These beliefs, which have formed the basis of traditional mass communication theories (such as agenda-setting and cultivation theory) are now claimed to be outdated by Bowman and Vela because of the arrival of social media. In fact, Bowman and Vela argue that the increased use of social media is causing a *Digitalegemeinschaft*, which is a modern version of the old close-knit societies that were known as *Gemeinschaft*. Therefore, these writers are

suggesting that social media is in the process of strengthening community ties, increasing civic engagement and contributing directly to the generation of social/political change (Bowman & Vela, 2011).

Furthermore, Bowman and Vela claim that empirical data support the idea of social media having a binding effect on society. For example, they report that survey research by Rainie, Purcell, and Smith (2011) shows that social media strengthens rather than weakens our participation in society. Online users are also more involved in their communities than those offline. In a similar vein, research by Hampton, Livio, and Goulet (2010) has found that free wireless access tended to increase and strengthen the users' social ties. Overall, therefore, Bowman and Vela argue that social media has ended the isolated society of the past and brought in a new, digitally-connected society (Bowman & Vela, 2011).

Overall, the perceived benefits of social media (as a tool for generating social and political change) are neatly summarised by Ghannam:

‘These social networks inform, mobilize, entertain, create communities, increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable. To peruse the Arab social media sites, blogs, online videos, and other digital platforms is to witness what is arguably the most dramatic and unprecedented improvement in freedom of expression, association, and access to information in contemporary Arab history’ (Ghannam, 2011, p.4).

1.1.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE: OPPONENTS

1.1.3.1. The Habermasian public sphere is outdated and not applicable to social media

Writers such as Roberts and Crossley (2004) argue that the ideal, exclusive nature of the Habermas public sphere bears little resemblance to new technologies, especially the Internet and social media. Therefore, his ideas are claimed to be outdated and irrelevant. Habermas's (1984; 1991) reference to public sphere participants as coming from the bourgeoisie is said to be unrepresentative of the diverse range of social media users that currently exist (Roberts and Crossley, 2004). Also, the Habermasian public sphere was theorised as a 'place' where bourgeois participants have free and equal access (1984; 1991), a characteristic that is less applicable to the online world where differences in access, motivation, digital skills and 'different usage' (Van Dijk 2012) determine a digital divide within members of society.

1.1.3.2. Regimes remain unaccountable with censoring and monitoring of social media

Noam (2005) claims that the higher rates of political discussions which take place on social media do not necessarily lead to increases in their effectiveness as a public sphere or to increases in the quality of communication. Instead, the higher levels of discussions can be expected to create more clutter in terms of irrelevant, confused and simplistic information. In addition, Noam (2005) does not believe that social media will increase the accountability of government officials to the public nor improve the public's access to them, the implication being that social media does not represent an effective public sphere (Noam, 2005). It has been further argued that the state, especially authoritarian regimes, can prevent social media from functioning as

an open public sphere through policies that include censoring, monitoring and the arrest/detention of individual users (Morozov, 2011). Likewise, Fuchs (2014, p. 57) proposes there are:

‘.....three antagonisms of the contemporary social media sphere in the realms of the economy, the state and civil society.....[T]hese limits can only be overcome if the colonisation of the social media lifeworld is countered politically so that social media and the Internet become public service and commons-based media.’

In other words, Fuchs (2014) supports the idea that social media is not an open public forum because of a range of external manipulations, censoring, monitoring, propaganda and various other influences that exist across different realms. His conclusion is that social media needs to become a part of the public sector if it is to operate as a free and open public sphere away from such antagonisms which are said to exist whilst it remains in the private sector (Fuchs, 2014). Fuchs (2013) also argues that the Internet/social media is not a public sphere through issues related to limited access (such as digital divide), the lack of political communication as compared to other types of communication (such as trivia and entertainment) and the lack of quality political discussions (insufficient detail and poor insight).

1.1.3.3. The relationships between social media users are weak and do not encourage offline activism

Gladwell (2010) is another sceptic who does not believe social media is important as a public sphere nor as a communications/organisational tool for generating revolutions or social/political change. For example, he argues that social media usually generates networks based around “weak tie and defines weak ties as being relationships between people who are not close friends. In other words, they are

mostly distant friends or acquaintances. Therefore, since the ties between social media users tend to be weak, it is highly unlikely that they will join with each other in risky action, such as attending demonstrations as activists on the street (Gladwell, 2010).

On the other hand, however, Gladwell says involvement in risky, radical action is mostly based upon “strong ties”, defined as relationships between people who are very close friends. Gladwell supports his arguments by discussing the 1964 Civil Rights campaign called Freedom Summer. During this long campaign through the summer, the activists who stayed until the end were usually the ones who had close friends (strong ties) accompanying them. On the other hand, the activists who gave up and did not stay to the end were usually the ones who were only acquaintances (weak ties). Furthermore, Gladwell claims this pattern can be observed in other situations; for example, he states that 70% of members from the Italian terrorist group the Red Brigades had at least one good friend already in the organisation. Similarly, the men who joined the Mujahideen in Afghanistan usually had close friends or relatives with them. Even the demonstrations in East Germany that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall were based on strong ties (Gladwell, 2010).

Jones (2011) summarises Gladwell very well by pointing out his suggestion that social media is good for keeping in touch with acquaintances, but that it rarely leads to high-risk activism. In fact, Gladwell believes that social media enables us to carry out low-risk activism because now we can support causes without too much personal commitment, such as the signing of on-line petitions. Yet Jones and Gladwell imply that this deceives people into thinking they are generating social/political change, when in reality this is not real activism (Jones, 2011).

1.1.3.4. Social media activism is poorly organised and has no clear leadership hierarchy

Similar to Jones, Joseph (2012) has also discussed some of Gladwell's arguments against the effectiveness of social media. For example, she accepts Gladwell's claim that successful activists need a clearly structured hierarchy and strong leadership because this may allow the efficient planning and implementation of an organisation's activities. Yet, contrary to this requirement, social media is seen by Gladwell as creating poorly organised groups that lack a hierarchy and do not have an overall leader (Joseph, 2012). This perspective is explained in the following words:

‘Because networks don't have a centralized leadership structure and clear lines of authority, they have real difficulty reaching consensus and setting goals (...). It is simply a form of organizing which favours the weak-tie connections that give us access to information over the strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger’ (Gladwell, 2010, pp. 48 & 49).

Gerbaudo (2014, p.264) also claims that social media activism tends to be characterised by ‘the absence of recognized leaders, common goals, or conventional organization.’ However, in focusing his attention on trying to understand how crowds of these types of activists are able to hold together in the absence of a hierarchy and central leadership planning, he suggests this is due to examples such as those ‘manifested in Twitter behaviour of the type of tweeting, retweeting, posting links or utilizing multiple hashtags. Through a multitude of these small transactions, Internet participants constantly contribute in weaving together different pieces of

cloth into a common texture, different networks into a ‘network of networks’, bestowed with a certain degree of coherence and rationality’ (ibid, p.264). Therefore the implication is that social media activism can still function successfully despite the lack of a hierarchy and central leadership planning.

1.1.3.5. Activists use of social media allows the regimes to identify them

Further arguments challenging the role of social media as agents of social and political change come from Morozov (2011a; 2011b) who uses examples, such as China and Iraq, to argue that Facebook and Twitter are tools that actually assist regimes because they enable the identification, tracking and arrest of opposition activists. In fact, rather than helping to bring about increases in freedom and human rights, Morozov (2011a; 2011b) believes that social media allows a regime to exert a higher level of control over society compared to the past. It is the vast pooling of information on social media that Morozov (2011a; 2011b) sees as bestowing greater powers to the regime for monitoring, censoring, and spreading pro-regime propaganda. Therefore, whilst writers such as Castells (2012) claim that the global Internet community will support social media activists against a regime, Morozov (2011a) believes that regimes have infinite resources to close and block sites, as well as infiltrate these groups and track down leading activists.

1.1.3.6. Social media discourse tends to be trivia and not open political discussions

Furthermore, he says that most people use social media for entertainment and trivia, instead of for social and political discourse. Therefore, it can be exploited by regimes as a means of keeping the population occupied in meaningless activities that do not challenge the political status quo. This is also an easier and cheaper means for a

regime to retain power as opposed to resorting to repression and violence. Similarly, when social media users do discuss social and political topics, Morozov (2011a) claims these tend to be shallow discussions without determined, physical action. Clearly, this point is reminiscent of Gladwell (2010) and his concept of weak ties.

In essence, Morozov (2011a; 2011b) is critical of two particular delusions that he believes exist, and in this sense his arguments may appear simplistic. Firstly, he criticises ‘cyber-utopianism’, which is the idea that social media is inevitably emancipatory. Secondly, he criticises ‘Internet-centrism’ which can be described as reflecting the technological determinist views of writers such as Castells (2012). Morozov (2011a; 2011b) claims this approach is wrong because social and political change are constantly being framed in terms of social media and the Internet. Curran et al. (2012) offer support for Morozov (2011a; 2011b) by also highlighting the political control that regimes can exert through their monitoring, censoring, and manipulation of the social media. He explains that even the supposedly ‘democratic’ and ‘Internet freedom-loving’ United States had cracked down hard on Wikileaks, blocked financial donations to the organisation, and brought about the imprisonment of ‘whistle blower’ Bradley Manning. Therefore, Curran et al. (2012) suggest that it is these contradictions that prevent the Internet and social media from generating genuine free speech and the open exchange of political ideas. Individuals can only utilise the system if they abide by the rules on information exchange as determined by the state.

1.1.3.7. Social media activism does not develop from online to offline

Fuchs (2013) is sceptical of social media’s potential to develop into off-line activism. He claims that Castells (2012) underestimates both the independent decision-making

ability of social media users and the influential role of family members and close friends. In other words, Fuchs (2013) directly challenges the ideas of Castells (2012) (and, indirectly those of Shirky, 2011) because he does not accept that a direct link necessarily exists between the existence of political information on social media, a change in the consciousness of the masses, and the spread of demonstrations on the street (Fuchs, 2013). Fuchs (2013) therefore questions the claims of Castells (2012) and Shirky (2011) who regard social media as a new public sphere where the exchange of political information will encourage users to take the risk of joining street protests. For Fuchs (2013) each person reasons in a unique and independent way, depending primarily on discussions with those they know very well and trust. Thus, he believes most people are unlikely to be swept up in mass movements, especially if they require determined commitment and may also be dangerous.

Nabil Dajani (2011) also downplays social media's potential for generating social/political change. On the one hand, he accepts that social media can help spread information and also help protesters to organise their activities. On the other hand, he puts forth two important arguments against social media. Firstly, Dajani (ibid) postulates that research data indicate mass media is not effective at changing peoples' opinions. In fact, he claims the Internet tends to strengthen peoples' existing attitudes because they usually seek out websites and other people with similar views to themselves. Thus, the ensuing discussions of agreement simply re-affirm and harden their current beliefs. Furthermore, he argues there is no empirical evidence to show that attitudes can be changed through social media and other mass media (Dajani, 2011). Therefore, this first argument of Dajani challenges the position of Shirky (2008; 2011), Petersen (2011) and others. Such writers have not only claimed that social media is a new public sphere where discussions will cause people to

change their opinions, but also this is essential if arguments for social/political change are to be spread among the population.

1.1.3.8. The traditional public sphere and face-to-face communication are more influential than social media

Dajani (2011) says the spoken word in face-to-face communication is far more important for generating social/political change than the written or digital word. He explains that protests took place and governments were brought down long before the invention of the Internet or social media. Yet, he believes this simple use of the human voice has been mostly ignored or has been considered insignificant by the majority of today's writers. Most importantly, since Dajani is himself a Muslim, he has listed a number of Arab/Islamic communication outlets which he says represent the Muslims' traditional public sphere. These are places where most Arabs and Muslims regularly meet each week in order to discuss general issues, current affairs and religion. And these places include the Mosque, Friday sermons in the Mosque that are compulsory for men to attend, Friday 'Majlis' gatherings (where the extended family meet after the Friday sermon), 'Sheesha' smoking bars, coffee houses and the coffeehouses' 'hakawati' storytellers.

All of these, says Dajani, are traditional face-to-face communication outlets which play a unique and important role in the Arab public sphere. Therefore, he argues that these must also be taken into consideration when discussing the influence of the public sphere in generating social/political change (Dajani, 2011). Mowlana endorses Dajani's notion that the Arabs' traditional public sphere (e.g. Mosques, Majlis, coffee shops and sheesher bars) are more influential than the public sphere of the new media (Mowlana, 1998). Interestingly, Juris (2012) found that face-to-face

communication was also crucial for those activists who mobilised the ‘Occupy’ sit-in movements (in Europe and the US during 2011). Although social media was important during the initial phases of planning and organising these protests, it seems face-to-face communication became more important the longer the sit-ins lasted. Juris (2012) also found that both online and offline activism played essential, complementary roles during these protests.

1.1.3.9. Social media activism fails because its communication is too rapid, brief and haphazard

Hassan (2011) is another who questions the positive, influential role of social media that has been claimed by Shirky and others. However, Hassan’s criticism is directed towards the fact that social media spreads information quickly, and this he says is detrimental to the generation of social/political change.

‘Democratic culture takes time to mature, and there can be no radical acceleration of this process in the way that is encouraged by networked communication’ (Hassan, 2011, p.8).

In essence, Hassan claims that every society must go through certain rhythms, processes and changes that happen slowly over time if the transition to democracy is to be successful. This is because political ideas, policies, institutions, and organizations that promote and implement political programmes all need plenty of time to develop properly. Therefore, Hassan argues that the speed of social media destabilizes these normal rhythms and processes that a changing society normally goes through. In particular, the accelerated speed of social media activism means that a political vacuum of chaos and confusion is likely to occur because the protesters do not have enough time to develop an organised structure, strong links or an agreed

political programme. The aims remain general slogans and vague ideas, and the detail that is needed to implement the objectives may not materialise initially (Hassan, 2011).

In support of his claims, Hassan refers to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as an example. He argues that events before and after the collapse were actually the final stages of a long process of changes in Eastern European societies that Hassan claims date back to at least 1789. Similarly, he says the Western concepts of democracy and political institutions were developed during the ‘Enlightenment’ period in the 18th century. The gradual spread of ideas that occurred through the slow, careful reading of printed words in books, pamphlets and newspapers was the most important factor. In contrast, according to Hassan, the digitalised words of social media transmit simplistic ideas very quickly, and this is contrary to the gradual process required for the successful change to democracy. It is interesting to note how Hassan uses the role of the printed press in Europe’s democratization process as an argument against social media (Hassan, 2011) while on the other hand, Shirky (2011) refers to the same process (as outlined by Habermas, 1991, above) as evidence in support of social media as a public sphere.

1.1.4 Social media as a public sphere: Others

There are a number of writers who do not fall squarely into either the ‘social media supporters’ or ‘social media opponents’ groups. For example, Barassi and Tere (2012) focus primarily on analysing the actual usage of social media, and also call for a re-assessment of the theories that are being applied. They explain their position *viz:*

‘Our aim has been on the one hand to urge scholars to take a step back and question the appropriateness of their theoretical models and on the other hand to stimulate the need to investigate users’ media practices as a way to inform the development of these models’ (Barassi and Trere, 2012, p.13).

In their study of activism among Italian students, Barassi and Trere (2012) found that their utilisation of social media was not straightforward. Rather, whilst social media and the Internet were being used by activists as tools for communicating, organising and planning their political activities, their general everyday use of social media and the Internet was weak. This suggests that activists prefer to use social media as an organisational tool and not as a public sphere for the exchange of political information. As the authors write:

‘Although Italian student activists develop their communication strategies on the basis of models of Web 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 and benefit from technological advances (e.g. they open websites, social media accounts, blogs, etc.) their everyday usage of these platforms do not (*sic*) reflect the communication processes (cognition, participation, co-operation) that are usually associated with Web developments’ (Barassi and Trere, 2012, p.13).

Mattoni (2012) draws attention to ‘precarious workers’ whom he defines as those employees without access to institutions that protect their human rights, such as trade unions. He claims that, since these workers do not have this protective facility, they are far more likely to rely upon social media and other new communication technologies as facilitators of mobilisation. Therefore, Mattoni (2012) implies that ordinary workers (as well as highly-educated activists and students) will increasingly utilise social media as a tool for their movements. However, whilst these claims of

Mattoni (2012) may apply to the US and the West, it is uncertain they can be applied to the Arab uprisings of late 2010/early 2011. The digital divide in Tunisia and Egypt at that time may suggest that the number of social media users were too low to make this a widely effective communication tool for mobilising the general workforce. On the other hand, however, it could be argued that a relatively small group of users could exert greater influence over the others if they used social media in addition to a range of other complementary tools.

Furthermore, there are writers such as Gerbaudo (2012) who suggest our understanding of social media's role during the uprisings should be based on a middle way. He describes his own approach as having been developed:

‘...in opposition not only to the unbounded techno-optimism of social media theorists such as Clay Shirky, but also to the techno-pessimism of commentators like Evgeniy Morozov and Malcom Gladwell. I argue that both positions are characterised by an essentialist vision of social media as being automatically either suitable or unsuitable as a means of mobilisation. These approaches tend to look at social media in the abstract, without due attention to their intervention in specific local geographies of action or to their embeddedness in the culture of the social movements adopting them’ (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.5).

Hence, Gerbaudo (2012) is seeking a balance between the views of social media optimists on the one hand and social media pessimists on the other hand, the implication being there may be an element of truth in both of these extremes. Importantly, Gerbaudo (ibid) also makes the valid point that our understanding should take into consideration the different geographical locations around the world

and different cultures. This is because people from different parts of the world and people with different cultures will have various social, economic, political, and historical factors influencing their adoption of social media as a tool for activism. Finally, it is interesting to note that Gerbaudo (ibid) echoes the claims of Dajani (2011) and Juris (2012) that face-to-face communication still plays a critical role in mobilising masses of protesters onto the streets. Again, the suggestion is that communicating face-to-face and communicating by social media are complementary to one another, perhaps with one being more important than the other depending upon various other factors, such as the stage of a revolution.

‘Once the movement hit the streets, these (social) media became less important than face-to-face communication. Tahrir square, with the bodily density it attracted, came to constitute a physical beacon for the coordination of the movement, which was why the communication blackout imposed by the Mubarak regime had only a limited effect’ (Gerbaudo, 2012, pp.15-16).

Dellicastelli (2011) outlines a number of communication technologies that are said to have benefitted successful uprisings of the past. The printed press, audio cassettes and photocopier machines are all described as helping various social movements. However, on the other hand, she also believes that none of these technologies was the trigger that actually caused these uprisings to begin. Interestingly, Dellicastelli uses similar reasoning to argue that the technology of social media was not the trigger that caused the uprisings to break out in Tunisia and Egypt. Rather, she believes that other factors were the cause of these Arab uprisings, and these factors included poverty, widespread corruption, high prices, and high levels of unemployment. Importantly, she says the trigger that turned these factors into the

physical action of street protests was not social media, but the death of Mohammad Bouazizi (Dellicastelli, 2011). Dellicastelli proposes that the positive role of social media lay in its use as a communication tool, enabling activists to rapidly spread information, plans and ideas.

1.1.5 Social Media as public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian Uprisings

The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia have often been connected to social media by various authors (Ghannam, 2011a, 2011b; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Castells, 2012; Khamis et al, 2012). In response, a number of academics have attempted to explore the role social media played in the emergence and evolution of the uprisings. Lotan et al (2011) argued that a positive correlation between the volume of Twitter usage on the one hand and major events on the other hand, was evidence that Twitter usage had played a role in starting and sustaining these uprisings. However the position of Lotan et al (2011) is challenged by Fuchs (2013) who argues that this type of analysis does not offer specific evidence that Twitter was used to successfully mobilise users to participate in the street protests. Nor does Fuchs (ibid) believe that the analysis of authors such as Lotan et al (2011) offer specific evidence of Twitter's actual role in street activism. Instead, Fuchs (2013, p.180) believes:

‘It is therefore likely that much of Twitter’s prominence in relation to the ‘Arab Spring’ arose from individuals in the West tweeting and retweeting, which may have helped to raise global awareness, but cannot be considered to have caused a revolution.’

In other words, Fuchs (2013) believes the increased volume of tweets at the time of the major events of the uprising stems mostly from higher levels of tweeting and retweeting (especially in Western countries) rather than from the mobilising and

organising/planning of the activists and users. Although Fuchs (2013) (see previous section) is critical of social media as a public sphere and believes that the Egyptian uprising was caused by factors other than social media, he does accept that social media was an effective communicational/organisational tool for activists and normal users. He writes:

‘The Egyptian revolution was a revolution against capitalism’s multidimensional injustices, in which social media were used as a tool of information and organization, but were not the cause of the revolution.’
(Fuchs, 2013, p. 203)

In addition, Lynch (2015) highlights the positive role that Facebook and Twitter played in the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings as organisational tools for activism and as tools for spreading information on the uprisings. Root (2012) also examined the role of Facebook during the Egyptian Uprising, with particular focus on the influential Facebook page of ‘We are all Khalid Said’. From this analysis, he states:

‘Facebook does have the necessary components of becoming a place for considered debate and a virtual public sphere, but that users’ inexperience with the platform has severely limited this capability.’ (Root, 2012, in Introduction)

Root (2012) made the interesting argument that Facebook was indeed a public sphere where detailed arguments took place, adding that obstacles to Facebook’s effectiveness as a public sphere tended to come from the inexperience of the users themselves. Similar to Root (ibid), Singh and Thakur (2013) asserted that the Internet and social media were instrumental in acting as a successful public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. They write:

‘The Internet is seen as helping marginalized groups- those groups excluded from the mainstream public sphere-develop their own deliberative forum, link-up and subsequently contest dominant meaning and practices.... earlier forms of mass communication limited action and discouraged active political participation and deliberative dialogue within public sphere’ (Singh and Thakur, 2013, p.39).

Singh and Thakur (2013) explain that the Internet/social media provided marginalised groups (including the Tunisian and Egyptian activists who had been censored by the regimes in their efforts to end free, open coverage in the mainstream media) with a public sphere where they could widely communicate their ideas and challenge the regime. Singh and Thakur (2013) also point out that the Internet/social media greatly assisted such groups in this way by providing them with a two-way communications tool whereas the mainstream mass media was a limited one-way communication where consumers received information with little opportunity to generate their own communication through the medium. The authors also explain that Tunisian and Egyptian activists were able to effectively utilise Facebook and Twitter because of ‘their many-to-many communication capabilities and the speed with which information can be transferred and spread’ (Singh and Thakur, 2013, p. 41).

Salanova (2012) is another writer who argues that social media was an effective public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, and that it helped to start the uprisings as well as helping to sustain them:

‘Social media has allowed citizens to be part of a social networking exercise and to engage in a public sphere that would have otherwise been unreachable

to them due to severe repression. In Tunisia and Egypt, social media helped protests start and expand thanks to their ability to coordinate and disseminate information quickly' (Salanova, 2012, p.3)

Faced with regime oppression, authoritarianism and control or censorship of mainstream media, Salanova (2012) says that social media provided the Tunisian and Egyptian people with a public sphere where they could challenge the dominant narrative of the regimes. Social media also granted the people (particularly the activists) a tool for planning and organising, with the added advantage that it had the capability of spreading information rapidly. Salanova (ibid) also states that 'citizen journalism' provided the mainstream media, most notably the international media and satellite TV, with a wealth of information and images that became increasingly trusted by them. Citizen journalists used social media as a public sphere to counter the censored and highly controlled state media and this increased general awareness of and support for the uprisings, especially after the international media and satellite TV began recycling this coverage (Salanova,2012).

Therefore, social media can be regarded as contributing to the development of civic engagement in Tunisia and Egypt by providing the people with the means to participate as citizens/activists. Social media can also be regarded as developing activism by encouraging users to join the street protests. Similarly, the people could use social media to plan, communicate and organise after they had joined the demonstrations, thereby reducing mobilisation costs (Salanova, 2012). Also, Salanova (2012, p.53) concludes his research by stating:

'The analysis of the role that social media have had on the Egyptian and the Tunisian revolts gives evidence of the impact new media technologies can

have on social transformation. They are used as a tool for fastening communication and coordination at a lower cost, although they cannot be seen as catalysts of any revolution by themselves. They are part of a broader media environment.’

Of important relevance to the investigation of this thesis, Salanova (2012) believes social media assisted in generating social changes through their usage by both activists and citizens as cheap tools for communication as well as for planning/organising. While Salanova (2012) does not regard social media as being the sole generator of the Egyptian and the Tunisian uprisings, he does believe Facebook and Twitter assisted in starting these uprisings in conjunction with the influence of other contributory factors. Likewise, similar enthusiasm for the successful role of the social media during these two countries’ uprisings is expressed by DeLong-Bas (2016, p.2):

‘Perhaps nowhere have the attempts to use social media to promote the principles of democracy in new ways been more visible than in Tunisia and Egypt, where Facebook and Twitter have been used to quickly disseminate information and instructions that the government has not been able to control’.

By highlighting the role of Facebook and Twitter as innovative communicative tools that assisted in generating democratic political change in these two countries’ uprisings, the writings of DeLong-Bas (2016) may also be regarded as providing indirect support for the public sphere by arguing that the social media was a new forum enabling activists and citizens to hold political debates and communicate. The extract also introduces an important idea (which will be discussed in the next

chapter), namely, that social media contributed towards social/political change. Indeed, DeLong-Bas (2016) concludes that:

‘Social media has opened the door to new and creative thinking about how to assemble, organize, plan, and strategize activities ranging from political to social change’ (DeLong-Bas, 2016, p.6)

This view is represented within the literature concerning technological determinism in the next chapter (chapter two).

1.2 CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER ONE

In order to understand the role of social media during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, this chapter has reviewed the literature as an important step towards establishing a definitive theoretical framework. With its focus on the main theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1984; 1991; 2006), a critical examination was conducted where it was shown how various authors have conceptualised this theory. In particular, the review of both theoretical and empirical work showed that the concept of social media as a potential public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings has a range of various supporters, opponents and neutrals. Therefore, an important aim of this chapter has been to examine these authors’ arguments so that their validity can later be tested by relating their claims back to the methodology and findings of this thesis.

To complete the theoretical framework (which was started in this chapter with the thesis’s primary theory of the public sphere), the following chapter will consider the implications of the complementary theory of technological determinism. Thus, since the literature review and the theoretical framework encompass both chapter one and chapter two, a summary of the theoretical conceptualisations (for the two chapters

combined) and a summary of the empirical research (for the two chapters combined) will be presented in the next chapter in order to clarify the main theoretical and empirical issues. Consequently, it can be said that this first chapter, through its critical review of the public sphere theory and its potential relevance to social media during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, has established a crucial foundation of relevant theoretical and empirical work. However, an important outstanding theoretical question (when considering the role of social media as a public sphere) relates to whether and how social media are technological tools capable of generating change. Therefore, this question is addressed in the next chapter, where we will consider theories on the role played by technology in social change.

CHAPTER TWO: TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM AND COMPLETION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER TWO

In order to complete the theoretical framework (which was started in chapter one's review of the public sphere) this chapter discusses theoretical and empirical evidence relating to the role of technology in social change. However, academics differ in the way in which they conceptualise the role of technology in general, as well as social media in particular, in promoting and fostering social movements. Therefore, technological determinism, the idea that technology is a determinant for social change, will be examined in terms of both the theoretical approaches and the empirical support that is available. In addition, a particular form of technological determinism, known as electronic colonialism, will be presented and evaluated. This is where it is claimed that the technologically dominant countries (such as America and other Western nations) tend to control the imposition of their culture upon recipient countries through the manipulative application of new media technology (McPhail, 2006; 2008).

On the other hand, in order to provide a balance to this discussion, the alternative perspective of technical and cultural appropriation will be presented in terms of its challenges to technological determinism. This is where this particular perspective, i.e. technical and cultural appropriation indicates that the users of new technology in recipient countries usually take control of the acquisition and cultural effects of that

new technology. Thus, technologically dominant countries tend not to impose their new technology on less developed recipient countries in a manipulative manner. This is because these recipient countries are willingly controlling their own acquisition of new technology, as well as controlling the cultural effects of that new technology (Lindtner et al, 2012).

Following on from this section, the overall literature will be brought up to date by reviewing recent contributions to the literature and thereafter the reader will be provided with a summary of the theoretical conceptualisations (of chapters one and two) and a summary of the empirical research (of chapters one and two). The purpose of these summaries is to clarify the main theoretical and empirical issues addressed in chapters one and two prior to a conclusion for this chapter. Finally, a conclusion will summarise the main issues and discussions within this chapter. It should also be noted that, during the later analysis stage of this thesis, the findings will be related back to all of these different perspectives from the literature (as reviewed in chapters one and two) in order to test the validity of the authors' arguments.

2.1 TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

2.1.1 The theory of technological determinism

Bearing in mind that this thesis aims to investigate social media's role in generating social and political changes during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, the researcher's main theory of the public sphere is complemented by the theory of technological determinism. Technological determinism is a theory that emphasises the role of technological developments (including the advent of new media

technology such as social media) in generating social change. Throughout history, according to technological determinists, certain technical developments have been the only cause or the main cause of changes made to societies. In other words, new communications/media technologies, such as the printed press, radio, television and the Internet, have fundamentally changed society (Chandler, 1995).

Technological determinists regard technology as an essential element for the development of society and some claim that new technologies generate change across all aspects of society, including culture, political institutions and personal interaction. In essence, new technology is seen as the driving force behind societal/political developments, with human and social factors regarded as secondary influences (Chandler, 1995). Hence, since the theory of technological determinism proposes that any new technological development will generate social change (Smith and Marx, 1994), the theory will be applied to the usage of social media during the uprisings. This is because social media was indeed a new technology at the time of the uprisings.

The literature presents two main versions of technological determinism. The first version has been described as the hard view and proposes that new technological developments will generate social change. Importantly, however, the hard view further claims that technological development is a force that is fully independent of social constraints (Smith and Marx, 1994). In other words, hard view technological determinism regards social change as an inevitable consequence of new technology, especially in the fields of communication and media. By contrast, whilst soft view technological determinism also argues that new technological developments will generate social change, it further suggests this process can be influenced by a range

of different social pressures. Hence, the soft view offers a greater degree of flexibility by allowing other potentially influential factors to be taken into account alongside the new technology itself.

2.1.2 Technological determinism: Supporters and opponents

One of the earliest advocates of the hard view is McLuhan (1967) who believes that new communication and media technology will directly affect society, its culture, its attitudes and opinions. In particular, he developed the idea of media determinism by claiming that the world had become transformed into a small global village by way of modern media. For McLuhan (ibid), people from the past, the present and the future tend to adapt to the various types of communication and media technology that dominate each of these different time periods. Therefore, since McLuhan started publishing his theories in the 1960s, attempts have been made to relate his ideas to the media of the era, such as newspapers, the radio and television.

During the 1990s, with the advent of satellite TV and the Internet, theoretical debates became dominated by the concept of globalisation. The term globalisation is used to refer to the increasingly interconnected world in which we now live, and hyper-globalists are technological determinists who believe the process of globalisation will eventually spread liberal democracy across the earth. Ultimately, hyper-globalists envisage the emergence of a new global civilisation based on universal social, political and economic institutions or organisations. Therefore, the existing social and political systems of most nation states will be fundamentally transformed. Furthermore, there will be a rise in global governance, cultural fusion and the creation of a New World Order (Held et al., 1999).

In contrast to the supporters of technological determinism, sceptics conclude that hyper-globalists are overly optimistic about globalisation generating such radical social and political change. For example, they argue that hyper-globalists have underestimated the ability of national governments to monitor, control and regulate social/economic/political activities. In fact, Chandler (1995) argues that technological determinists have developed a type of techno-centrism, where they exaggerate the role of new (media) technology. He also suggests that we re-consider just how influential such new tools are upon our behaviour, raising the question of whether people are in control of them or do they control or influence people?

Chandler and other critics of technological determinism also claim that technology alone, despite its importance, is not the only driving force behind social change. Technology and various other factors are all influences working together. Therefore, such critics have suggested that social change is a highly complex and subtle process, which media and communication changes alone cannot explain. Chandler discusses the issue through the concepts of Reductionism and Holism:

‘Technological determinism involves reductionism, which aims to reduce a complex whole to the effects of one part.....Reductionism contrasts with 'holism', which is broadly concerned with the whole phenomenon and with complex interactions within it rather than with the study of isolated parts....Reductionism is widely criticized as a way of approaching social phenomena. It is impossible to isolate a single cause for any social process and to prove that it is the primary determinant’ (Chandler, 1995, pp. 4 -5).

In criticising the reductionism of technological determinism, Chandler is offering his support for Holism. In other words, he suggests that the influence of socio-historical

contexts should be taken into account when assessing social change. A balance can then be made through the interaction of social, cultural and economic forces on the one hand and the technological influences on the other hand (Chandler, 1995).

2.1.3 Technological determinism and its relevance to electronic colonialism

In discussing the theory of technological determinism and its potential application to social media, consideration should also be given to the concept of electronic colonialism as proposed by McPhail (2006). The reason why the potential influences of electronic colonialism are deemed relevant to this thesis is that such influences would likely affect social media's ability to function as a public sphere for generating social and political change. Firstly, however, it should also be noted that electronic colonialism has close links to dependency theory. Dependency theory argues that the world system keeps poor countries impoverished and the rich countries enriched. In particular, the poor countries are dependent on the rich countries for economic growth, technology and foreign currency. Therefore, the structure of the world economy is to the detriment of certain nations because their development is subject to the expansion and progress of other countries (Ferraro, 2008).

McPhail (2006) discussed electronic colonialism theory in great detail, combining his ideas with elements of Wallerstein's world system theory (Wallerstein, 1976). In terms of global communications technology, the world system theory describes three categories of countries. Core nations are those that are equipped with modern technology while semi-peripheral nations (such as Tunisia and Egypt) are those in the transitional stage which are striving to gain access to modern technology, and peripheral nations are those with poor information and communication technology.

This implies that the majority of developing countries rely on advanced countries for their technology and information (Wallerstein, 1976).

McPhail (2006) accepted world systems theory as an explanation for the economic, political, cultural, and social interactions between dominant and dependent countries. However, he also used electronic colonialism theory to outline the various forms of communication technology. This then enabled him to describe how dependency extended to ‘communication hardware and software, along with engineers and technicians’ that change ‘domestic cultures, habits, values, and the socialization process itself’ (McPhail, 2006, p.14). Therefore, McPhail’s conclusions are very similar to those of Schiller (1992) and others who claim that the technology of electronic media and its content (of images, messages, and advertising) cause changes in the dependent nations’ attitudes and social/political values because they move towards a Western type of lifestyle, especially materialism.

McPhail (2008) later used electronic colonialism theory to argue that media messages are impacting on the minds of dependent countries’ citizens. For, whereas the old colonisers occupied foreign countries’ lands in order to exploit them for huge profits, today’s communication giants (including Facebook and Twitter) are seeking to capture the minds of their users in order to attain huge profits. In particular, the American media corporations want to use the large numbers of their users as a means of attracting increasing revenues from advertisers. As a result, the minds of the foreign audience, it is argued, become more Americanised as the repeated viewing of media adverts, brands and images greatly influences them. In fact, electronic colonialism is said to be establishing an empire of the mind because the media messages and advertising are affecting the minds, behaviour and beliefs of people

around the world. In sum, this is the market strategy that America's media corporations are using to dominate the global economy (McPhail, 2008).

Therefore, since modern media primarily promotes consumption and the satiation of one's own desires, so its users have come to believe that satisfaction, happiness, status, and knowledge can only be achieved through the acquisition of and submission to the instruments of modernity, especially new media technology (Alam, 2012). Indeed, it is interesting that such a relatively high proportion of Tunisian and Egyptian youth regularly use Facebook. This may indicate that young Arabs are becoming increasingly westernised and materialistic. However it is not clear in what direction the relationship goes, i.e. whether materialism causes Facebook use or vice versa. Alternatively, there could also be a third factor (e.g. a change in the social, political and economic structures) which could cause both. Nonetheless, Alam (2012) explains that media consumption now plays a significant part in people's everyday lives, whether at home, work, leisure or social communication. Moreover he informs us that social media has dramatically accelerated these trends around the world. However, with respect to dependent countries (such as Tunisia and Egypt), he warns that the unfortunate outcome is likely to be chaos and disorder:

'The core of electronic colonialism is the propagation of Western values and ideals...Electronic colonialism, subtle as it is, robs cultural conceptions of their own identity and leads to political, social and economic destabilisation' (Alam, 2012, p.5).

In other words, the electronic colonialism as described by McPhail (2006; 2008) may be regarded as a part of the technological determinism of McLuhan (1967) because both theorise that new media technology has the power to generate social and

political change. Yet electronic colonialism, as a specific category of the more general theory of technological determinism, draws particular attention to how new media technology can be deliberately manipulated by the interventionist policies of dominant countries. Therefore, when applied to social media, electronic colonialism theory suggests that such intervention will adversely affect social media's ability to operate as an open, freely functioning public sphere.

2.1.4 The challenges of technical and cultural appropriation

In the sub-section above, it was shown that electronic colonialism can be regarded as one category or one specific component of technological determinism. However, in attempting to determine whether it is the new technology itself or the people's use of that new technology which may generate social change, the concept of technical and cultural appropriation has also been included in the theoretical framework of this thesis. As discussed below in this sub-section, technical and cultural appropriation pose specific challenges to the arguments of electronic colonialism. As such, it helps the researcher to arrive at a balanced understanding of the relationship between the advent of new technology (such as social media during the uprisings) on the one hand versus any generated social/political changes on the other hand. For example, Baillette and Kimble (2008, p.3) noted that:

‘Two positions, one based on notions of technological determinism where the technology itself plays the key role, and the other, which argues that people determine the effect of a technology [and] not the other way round, dominated much of the thinking about information systems, people and organisations for some time.’

Thus, Baillette and Kimble (2008) explain that this debate (over whether it is the technology or the user of the technology that might generate social change) has

continued in academic literature for a sustained period of time. Furthermore, they also explain that the concepts of technological and cultural appropriation have emerged from this debate. In terms of defining technological and cultural appropriation, Lindtner et al (2012, p.1) offer the following:

‘Technology appropriation refers to the ways that people adapt and “make the technology their own”.....Cultural appropriation takes into account [the fact] that appropriation of technology is increasingly taking place within translocal contexts’.

In other words, although Lindtner et al (2012) make a distinction between technological appropriation on the one hand and cultural appropriation on the other hand, these authors do suggest a close relationship between the two ~~of them~~. In particular, the term ‘appropriation’ is used to imply that a recipient society will actively seek out new technology and new cultural influences from another nation. However, these acquisitions are claimed to be owned by the recipient society in the sense that control will be retained over their own local culture as well as over any cultural changes or developments that may occur (Lindtner et al, 2012). Thus, in applying these concepts of technological and cultural appropriation to the context of social media usage during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, the implication is that the Arabs in the two countries tended to be willing users of social media who controlled its acquisition and also its cultural effects. This then challenges the electronic colonialism narrative that the technologically-dominant countries tend to impose their culture on recipient countries through the manipulative application of new media technology (McPhail, 2006; 2008).

Rogers (2006, p.474) also offers a definition of cultural appropriation. This definition (which is broader than that of Lindtner et al.,2012, above) is as follows:

‘Cultural appropriation, [is] defined broadly as the use of a culture’s symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture....and [assists] in the survival of subordinated cultures and their resistance to dominant cultures.’ (Rogers, 2006, p.474)

From this definition, it is apparent that Rogers (2006) regards the appropriation of new technologies as a single category of cultural appropriation rather than as an independently separate concept as stated by Lindtner et al (2012). Nonetheless, although Rogers (2006) also lists here a number of other different categories of cultural appropriation in addition to that of technologies, he does agree with the general idea of Lindtner et al (2012) that appropriation is primarily associated with the recipient society maintaining control over its own cultural development. This emphasis upon cultural control is highlighted by the explanation that ‘cultural appropriation, however, is an active process and, in this sense, retains the meaning of a *taking*’ (Rogers, 2006, p.476). In other words this corresponds to the idea that the recipient society voluntarily takes those aspects of technology and culture that it wants from another (dominant) society, yet this process tends to be deliberate and controlled (Berker et al, 2006; Flew and Cunningham, 2010).

Rogers (2006) further proposes that the concept of ‘transculturation’ should be taken into account because this highlights both ‘appropriation and hybridity’ (Rogers, 2006, p.478). In other words, transculturation takes the claims of appropriation even further because it argues that the willing acquisition of the dominant nation’s technology and culture by the acquiring nation will enable that acquiring nation to develop into a different form of hybrid society altogether. The hybrid society actively combines technological, cultural and social elements of the two nations together,

thereby generating an outcome of social/political change that emerges from the will of the acquiring nation. Hence appropriation and hybridity imply the generation of voluntary social/political change by the acquiring nation (Rogers, 2006), as opposed to an outcome proposed by the electronic colonialism of McPhail (2006; 2008) where a dominant nation is said deliberately to impose its culture upon a weaker nation through its manipulation of new media technology. Thus, the application of transculturation to the theme of this project would suggest that Tunisians and Egyptians were in control of both social media adoption and its usage during the uprisings. In particular, any technological and cultural changes that arose from these processes were achieved through their active wills rather than through the manipulation of a dominant culture.

2.2 MORE RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO LITERATURE

In this section, the overall literature review is brought up to date by examining recent contributions from a range of different authors. Although the collation of these recent contributions means that literature related to both the public sphere and to new technology has been brought together here, this provides the reader with a clear overview of how the academic discussions in this field are currently evolving. For example, in accordance with earlier social media supporters such as Shirky (2011), a proportion of more recent literature still argues that social media played a positively influential role in generating and sustaining the Arab uprisings. For example, Alahmed (2014, p. 25) writes:

‘The Arab Spring is not only about people in the Arab world; the events of the Arab Spring represent the impact that the new global media platforms have on people’s abilities to connect and communicate. It is evidence of

global solidarity, global citizen activism, and civic engagement; journalists, for instance, using social media, became closer to their readers; because the journalists updated the events of the revolutions as they were happening, they enabled people to know what was happening at all times without the usual delay’.

Alahmed (2014) supports the idea that Facebook and Twitter were crucial to the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. He also highlights the global solidarity of Arabs, which was achieved through the global nature of social media and which caused uprisings to spread from country to country. Alahmed (2014) further draws attention to the important role of social media for mainstream journalists who were able to draw upon up-to-date information on events from Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, Aboubaka (2013) supports the idea that Facebook caused the uprisings to start in both Tunisia and Egypt. He claims it was the essential driving force behind the street protests, and that it helped to break the barrier of fear which had existed for so many decades.

On this note, Lim (2013, p.1) adds:

‘The 2010 uprising was successful because activists successfully managed to bridge geographical and class divides as well as to converge offline and online activisms. Such connection and convergence were made possible, first, through the availability of dramatic visual evidence that turned a local incident into a spectacle. Second, by successful frame alignment with a master narrative that culturally and politically resonated with the entire population. Third, by activating a hybrid network made of the connective structures to facilitate collective action – among Tunisians who shared

collective identities and collective frames – and connective action – among individuals who sought more personalized paths to contribute to the movement through digital media.’

Lim (2013) highlights issues such as the perceived collectiveness of the Tunisians (as brought about by their shared cultural beliefs and their shared political determination to remove Ben Ali as president) that enabled online activism to be translated into the offline activism of mass street protests. In addition, research by Bruns et al (2013, p. 1) on Twitter usage during the Egyptian uprising found that there was a significant interaction of tweets sent by English, Arabic, and mixed-language Twitter users. In other words, they identified extensive information flows between the English and Arabic-speaking users of Twitter across the international Twittersphere which suggests important links established by these users in terms of bridging the two language spheres.

Building upon and offering support to previous studies by writers such as Lotan et al (2011), this research by Bruns et al (2013) reviewed hashtags during the Arab uprisings in Egypt and Libya to show a positive correlation between Twitter usage and the main events of the period. Bruns et al (2013) draw attention to overlaps between Arabic and English users, thereby highlighting the global dimension of social media usage and the fact that many users are bi-lingual or multi-lingual. Subsequent research by Brym et al (2014) further supported these findings.

A study by Brym et al (2014, p.1) concludes that:

‘Examining the independent effects of a host of factors associated with high-risk movement activism, the paper concludes that using some new electronic communications media was associated with being a demonstrator. However,

grievances, structural availability, and network connections were more important than was the use of new electronic communications media in distinguishing demonstrators from sympathetic onlookers.’

This study by Brym et al (2014) identified a positive correlation between being a social media user and being a demonstrator during the uprisings. Yet these researchers also draw attention to the importance of other factors (such as poverty, authoritarianism and corruption) in encouraging individuals to change from being sympathisers to offline demonstrators in the street.

On the other hand, Wolfsfeld et al (2013) downplay the significance of social media as an influencing factor in generating the uprisings. In fact, Wolfsfeld et al (2013, p. 1) argue that ‘a significant increase in the use of the new media is much more likely to follow a significant amount of protest activity than to precede it.’ Another who downplays the role of social media during the Egyptian uprising is Srinivasana (2014) who claims that the links between social media and traditional media played an important role during the uprisings. Without this link with and support from traditional media (such as Al Jazeera TV) Srinivasana (2014) questions whether the uprising would have succeeded as it did in removing Mubarak. Sultan (2014) also highlights the increasingly influential role being played by Al Jazeera TV in the Arab world. This influence has grown immensely over the past fifteen years, with the part it played during the uprisings being described as particularly important. Under the guidance of the reforming Emir of Qatar, Sultan (2014) explains that Al Jazeera TV has pursued an approach that is both reformist and progressive, thereby assisting the Arab regimes in their political struggles.

Cook (2013, p.9) writes that:

‘Exploring and analysing the ways in which social media has contributed to changing the course of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt provides important insight into ways social media sites can facilitate democratic movements. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the movements are democratizing the nations in which they take place; it is still too early to tell what new governments will arise now that the old regimes have been overthrown. So while these movements were originally aided by the Internet, its use does not guarantee a positive outcome. This is because, while the Internet played a largely positive role in the Arab uprisings, it is not itself inherently good’.

Cook (2013) makes a valid point of neutrality, which is supported in the findings of this thesis; that is, that although social media assisted the Tunisian and Egyptian people in ridding themselves of their authoritarian leaders, this does not necessarily mean that the final outcome will be one of positive social and political change. Indeed, the analysis and discussion chapter of this thesis will show that the current situation in these two countries (both socially and politically) is now one of more violence, instability and uncertainty as compared to the pre-uprising era. Karatzogianni (2013, pp.10-11) appears to concur by stating that ‘the Internet facilitates repression, too...Beware Animal Farm (that is, who replaces the regimes and what type of democratization occurs).’ In the Analysis and Discussion chapter of this thesis, as well as in the section on the Situation Today within the conclusion of this thesis, this problem (especially in light of the currently increased authoritarianism in Egypt) is discussed in more detail.

2.3 SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS

In order to clarify the different theoretical conceptualisations that were reviewed in chapters one and two, and how these relate to the social media, an overall summary will now be set out in this section. During the discussions of the first chapter, it was shown that some authors see social media as a public sphere due to a variety of reasons. For instance, Dahlgren (2005) draws attention to social media as a forum for public discussion, debate and interaction, which are all elements typical of a public sphere. On the other hand, Papacharissi (2009) proposes that social media offers a forum where online activism can foster offline activism. Shirky (2011) also regards social media as a public sphere that can generate offline activism, allowing (Arab) people to discuss ‘forbidden’ social and political issues (Shirky, 2011). With direct reference to the Habermas (1984) concept of the public sphere, Shirky (2011) argues that the discussions on social media will have a persuading influence on people, causing them to ‘develop’ their opinions and attitudes, and thereby encourage them to join the street protests. This implies that social media has the potential to create and develop an entire social movement.

In addition, Shirky (2011) also emphasizes the role of social media in helping activists to raise awareness of their calls of freedom and democracy, by spreading their message to the masses of the general population. Similarly, Benkler (2006) and Petersen (2011) say social media has produced a global public sphere by linking individuals and communities together, even those who are separated by large geographical distances. Authors such as Ghannam (2011) further claim these social media networks increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable. Social media has even been said to generate the most dramatic increases in freedom

of expression in recent Arab history (Ghannam, 2011). Also Root (2012) argues that Facebook represents a public sphere because of the detailed arguments that take place there, whilst Salanova (2012), Singh and Thakur (2013) and DeLong-Bas (2016) explain how this allowed marginalised groups (including the Tunisian and Egyptian activists) to communicate their ideas, challenge the regime and seek to generate social/political change.

In contrast to these authors who regard social media as a public sphere, chapter one also reviewed the literature of sceptics who are critical of social media's role as a public sphere. For example, Roberts and Crossley (2004) state that Habermas's (1984; 1991) reference to public sphere participants as coming from the bourgeoisie is inappropriate as it does not account for the diverse range of social media users who are currently active. The Habemasian public sphere (where bourgeois participants are claimed to have free and equal access) also does not address issues of digital divide in access, motivation, digital skills and different usage (Van Dijk 2012).

Noam (2005) argues that increased political discussions on social media do not necessarily improve its effectiveness as a public sphere, nor raise the quality of communication or increase government accountability. Rather, Morozov (2011) and Fuchs (2014) claim that authoritarian regimes can prevent social media from functioning as an open public sphere through policies that include censoring, monitoring and the arrest/detention of individual users. Therefore Gladwell (2010) describes the relationships between social media users as weak where distant friends or acquaintances are unlikely to persuade each other to take risky action, such as joining the street demonstrations. Dajani (2011) also says social media is not effective in changing peoples' attitudes or opinions, and Dajani (2011) supports Juris

(2011) in claiming that the spoken word in face-to-face communication is far more influential.

With regard to other authors who are neither outright supporters nor opponents of social media as a public sphere, Gerbaudo (2012) suggests our understanding of social media's role during the uprisings should be based on a middle way between social media optimism and scepticism. Gerbaudo (2012) also agrees that face-to-face communication plays a vital role in mobilising masses of protesters onto the streets. On the other hand, Dellicastelli (2011) draws attention to the importance of various other factors (including poverty, widespread corruption, high prices, and high levels of unemployment) as contributory causes of the uprisings.

In this chapter, different positions were also addressed concerning technological determinism (Smith and Marx, 1994). This included a review of authors who may be described as hard view technological determinists, including McLuhan (1967) and Castells (2012), those who may be described as soft view technological determinists, including Shirky (2011), and those who may be described as opponents of technological determinism, including Chandler (1995). Since technological determinism refers to the potential for new media technology to generate social and political change, this theory will be applied to investigate the use of social media as a tool for communicating, organising and planning collective action.

Castells (2012) claimed that Facebook and Twitter were the essential catalysts of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as being the generators of social and political change. Castells (2012) and Shirky (2011) discussed how social media enables activists to communicate, plan and organise their activities. Lynch (2015) also highlights the positive role that Facebook and Twitter played in the Tunisian and

Egyptian uprisings, both as organisational tools for activism and as tools for spreading information on the uprisings. He also draws attention to the importance of citizen journalism, as well as to the interconnections between the different forms of media. Similarly, Salanova (2012) and Singh and Thakur (2013) point out that social media greatly assisted activists by providing them with a two-way communication tool that was cheap and rapid. Therefore the April 6 Movement, which relied heavily on social media, was described as probably the best organized and most influential of all the opposition groups that took to the streets in the earliest days of the uprising, utilizing social media as an essential means of planning, organizing, informing, persuading, and communicating (Khamis et al, 2012). Barassi and Trere (2012) even suggest that activists prefer to use social media as an organisational tool, rather than as a public sphere, for the exchange of political information.

By contrast, Gladwell (2010) claims that social media activists are poorly organised because they lack clearly structured hierarchies and strong leadership. Hence, he claims that they are unlikely to succeed. On the other hand, Hassan (2011) believes social media activism will fail because rapid communication will lead to a political vacuum of chaos and confusion. Hassan (2011) argues that the speed of social media destabilizes the normal rhythms and processes that a changing society should go through.

This chapter also discussed issues surrounding the possible manipulation of social media, focusing primarily on applying McPhail' (2008) notion of electronic colonialism to social media. This is the possibility that media messages from dominant Western countries are impacting on the minds of dependent countries' citizens, thereby having a Westernising or Americanising effect on countries such as

Tunisia and Egypt. Such arguments also appear to have indirect support from other authors including Ramadhan (2012).

Finally, this chapter reviewed the more recent contributions to literature. Here there was a discussion of the views of authors Aboubaka (2013) and Alahmed (2014), who believe that social media both caused and sustained the uprisings. Likewise, Lim (2013) is of the view that social media helped to increase the scale of the uprisings by transforming online activism into offline activism. In addition, Bruns et al (2013) drew attention to the overlaps between Arabic and English users (thereby highlighting the global dimension of social media usage) whilst Brym et al (2014) identified a positive correlation between being a social media user and being a demonstrator during the uprisings. However, Brym et al (2014) also recognised the importance of other factors (such as poverty, authoritarianism and corruption) in encouraging individuals to change from being sympathisers to becoming offline demonstrators in the street.

In contrast, Wolfsfeld et al (2013) claim that significant levels of social media usage are more likely to happen after protest activities rather than prior to it, whereas Srinivasana (2014) believes that the links with and support from traditional media (such as Al Jazeera TV) were more influential than social media during the uprisings. In addition, although it can be said that social media assisted the Tunisian and Egyptian people in ousting their authoritarian leaders, this does not necessarily mean that the final outcome will be one of positive social and political change (Cook, 2013; Karatzogianni, 2013).

2.4 SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In order to clarify the overall empirical evidence appertaining to social media, as reviewed in chapters one and two (as a potential public sphere, as an organisational tool and in terms of generating social/political change during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings) a summary of the empirical research will now be set out in this section.

With regard to the potential for social media to operate as a public sphere prior to the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, there is a range of literature written by authors who arrived at theoretical conclusions without conducting their own empirical research (see Footnote 1). On the other hand, whilst authors such as Andrews and Caren (2010) did carry out empirical research during the pre-uprisings period, their work did not include Tunisia or Egypt. Therefore, although Andrews and Caren (2010) found that social media is a public sphere that can mobilize large numbers of people, their findings are not directly relevant to this thesis because these researchers focused solely on the United States through a study that included surveys with 187 organizational leaders only in North Carolina.

In terms of literature that was written after the Arab uprisings had started and which also discussed the role of social media as a potential public sphere during these uprisings, many of these writers critically reviewed the work of previous authors in order to arrive at conclusions without the support of their own empirical research (see Footnote 2).

Footnote 1: Dahlgren (2000, 2005) Noam (2005) Dahlberg (2007) Shirky (2008) Papacharissi (2009) and Gladwell (2010).

With respect to empirical research, Ghannam (2011b) carried out a detailed study of social media usage by Arabs for the period immediately prior to the uprisings. Although this paper's findings are general because the writer combined results from a number of different Arab countries, the study did include Tunisia and Egypt and generated comprehensive information from over 35 interviews. From his analysis of these findings, Ghannam (2011b) is generally very supportive of the idea that social media was an effective public sphere and organisational/communicational tool for activism just before the uprisings started. Similarly, Salanova (2012) is positive with regard to social media by describing it as an effective public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Although Salanova (2012) did not conduct interviews or distribute survey questionnaires, this case study did examine data on social media penetration and grassroots movements in the two countries of interest to this thesis.

In addition, empirical research was conducted by Brym et al (2014) in order to investigate the role of social media and other factors during the Egyptian Uprising. A sample of 1,005 Egyptians from the Gallup World Poll was analysed and it was concluded that 'new electronic communications media constituted an important and independent cause of the protests in so far as they enhanced the capacity of demonstrators to extend protest networks, express outrage, organize events, and warn

Footnote 2: Bowman and Vela (2011) Dajani (2011) Dellicastelli (2011) Dunn (2011) Elseewi (2011) Ghannam (2011a) Hassan (2011) Morozov (2011a, 2011b) Petersen (2011) Shirky (2011) Simonetti (2011) Gladwell (2011) Miladi (2011) Barassi and Treré (2012) Castells (2012) Dalacoura (2012) Joseph (2012) Mourtada and Salem (2012) Root (2012) Aboubaka (2013) Arshad (2013) Cook (2013) Fuchs (2013a, 2013b) Lim (2013) Singh and Thakur (2013) Fuchs (2014) Gerbaudo (2014) Hamed (2014) Lynch (2015) and DeLong-Bas (2016).

comrades of real-time threats' (Brym et al, 2014, p.266). Hence, Brym et al (2014) found that social media helped to cause the street protests of the Egyptian uprising because it was an effective organisational and communicational tool for activism.

On the other hand, the empirical research of Esseghaier (2013) generated results that are less enthusiastic regarding the role of social media as a potential public sphere or organisational/communicational tool. Nonetheless this study is also relevant to this thesis as it is based on critiquing the concept of a 'Twitter Revolution' specifically in Tunisia through the completion of surveys involving 50 Tunisians. After analysing the findings of this research, Esseghaier (2013) concluded that describing the Tunisian uprising as a 'Twitter Revolution' actually devalues its real underlying causes. The respondents also emphasised that social media was not a completely free and open public sphere because of strict Internet laws in the country with severe penalties for breaking them (Esseghaier, *ibid*).

Through an analysis based upon semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations, Srinivasan (2014) focused specifically on the Egyptian uprising and significantly downplayed the influence of social media as a public sphere during that period. The study was comprehensive as it included 115 interviewees 'ranging from journalists, Ikhwan leadership, Revolutionary Socialists, April 6 Youth Movement activists, politically active bloggers, striking workers, residents of inner city Cairo slums, and Christian minorities' (Srinivasan, 2014, p. 71). Therefore, the empirical research of Esseghaier (2013) and Srinivasan (2014) may be described as pessimistic of social media's role as a public sphere or organisational/communicational tool when compared to the optimism of Ghannam (2011b) Salanova (2012) and Brym et al (2014). On the other hand, however, Gerbaudo (2012) reached a different

conclusion after investigating the role of tweets during the uprisings. Following interviews with seven Tunisian activists and 22 Egyptians from across a broad spectrum of different occupations, Gerbaudo (2012) suggests that we should actually try to understand the role of social media based upon a middle way between the two extremes of optimism and pessimism.

The empirical research carried out by Wolfsfeld et al (2013) is one that does not focus specifically on Tunisia or Egypt during the uprisings because data were collected which ‘examined the political situation and extent of digital, broadcast, and social media penetration in twenty Arab countries’ (Wolfsfeld et al, 2013, p.7). Yet, although the results of these countries were collated, which suggests they might not apply specifically to Tunisia and Egypt, these two countries were included in the research. In their conclusions, Wolfsfeld et al (2013) highlighted ‘the critical importance of considering political context before attempting to analyse the role of social media’ (Wolfsfeld et al, 2013, p.18). Interestingly, the political context is also considered relevant to this thesis since chapter 4 will attempt to discuss the social and political contexts of Tunisia and Egypt during the period surrounding the uprisings in these two countries.

Furthermore, whilst it has been explained above that Gerbaudo (2012) sought to investigate the role of tweets during the uprisings by conducting interviews with seven Tunisian activists and 22 Egyptians, there are other Twitter studies that are based on analysing the actual tweets themselves. For example, Choudhary et al (2012) used advanced algorithms in order to analyse over 800,000 tweets related to the Egyptian revolution during the period from late January to early February 2011. This analysis found that ‘a significant portion of the discussion reflected broadcast

news of ongoing events, with most influential users and tweets delivering news and a large proportion of messages as a way to repost this news for others within, as well as outside, Egypt' Choudhary et al (2012, pp. 79-80). In other words, Choudhary et al (2012) claim that tweets often recycled broadcast news of the uprising, thereby implying there was a close association between these different media. It is further stated that the tweets disseminated this news both nationally and internationally which suggests that Twitter also functioned as a form of public sphere.

Similarly, Bruns and Burgess (2014) compared patterns of Twitter interactive usage during the Egyptian uprising for the period from January to November 2011. Using custom-made tools for processing 'big data,' an examination was conducted in terms of the volume of tweets sent by English, Arabic, and mixed-language Twitter users across this period. This included investigating 'the networks of interaction (variously through @replying, retweeting, or both)' (Bruns and Burgess, 2014, p. 1). From this, the authors identified 'general patterns of information flow between the English and Arabic-speaking sides of the Twittersphere ...[which] ... highlight the roles played by users bridging both language spheres' (Bruns and Burgess, 2014, p.1). In addition, another Twitter study by Yette (2012) was also discussed in the literature review. Although Yette (ibid) adopted content analysis as a methodology in this study for examining Twitter usage by three Egyptians, the findings are interesting because they suggest that Twitter was an effective organisational/communicational tool for mobilising Egyptians to participate in the street protests.

It should also be noted that a number of additional empirical studies will be discussed in chapter four. These will include the Twitter research by Lotan et al (2011) where the tweets of Tunisian and Egyptian users during the uprisings were

analysed in terms of the information flows of near-duplicate tweets. The ‘analysis is based on two data sets acquired during the height of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings.....The first dataset includes 168,663 tweets posted January 12–19, 2011, containing the keywords #sidibouziid or “tunisia.” The second includes 230,270 tweets posted January 24–29, 2011, containing the keywords “egypt” or #jan25’ (Lotan et al, 2011, p.7). The conclusion drawn from this analysis by the authors is that ‘Twitter plays a key role in amplifying and spreading timely information across the globe’ (Lotan et al, 2011, p.1). Therefore, this seems to offer indirect validation for the idea that Twitter was an important public sphere and communicational tool during the uprisings in these two countries.

The empirical research of Howard et al (2011) will also be discussed in chapter four because this is a comprehensive study of Tunisian and Egyptian users, which included creating a database of information collected from Facebook conversations and the analysis of over 3 million tweets. The three key findings that were highlighted are: ‘[F]irst, social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring. Second, a spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground. Third, social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders’ (Howard et al, 2011, pp.2-3). Hence, the analytical studies of tweets tend to be positive regarding the role of Twitter as a public sphere and communicational tool during the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt (Howard et al, 2011; Lotan et al, 2011; Choudhary et al, 2012; Yette, 2012; Bruns and Burgess, 2014).

Other empirical research to be discussed in chapter four includes the study by Carlson (2011) who investigated the Tunisian uprising through separate interviews with Zeynep Tufekci (a Tunisian sociology professor), Nasser Weddady (a Mauritania expert in Internet activism), and Ethan Zuckerman and Jillian York (both of Harvard University's Berkman Centre for Internet & Society). However, as will be shown in chapter four, the opinions of these participants are often contradictory in nature, thereby resulting in conclusions that are not clear with regard to the role of social media. Likewise, chapter four will review the research of Howard (2011) who interviewed Rim Nour (a young female Tunisian activist who participated in the Tunisian uprising). Whilst Nour emphasises 'regional disparities, corruption, unemployment' (Howard, 2011, p.2) as the underlying causes of the uprising, she also says the Tunisian uprising was driven by the country's citizens. 'Nour said that Twitter played an important initial role in Tunisia for much of December.... After December 24th Facebook soon became the main organizing tool for protests and sharing videos' (Howard, 2011, p.3).

In chapter four, reference will also be made to the empirical research of Gerbaudo (2013) who analysed the Egyptian uprising following interviews with 15 middle-class activists. With particular focus on the Internet blackout (which was implemented by Egypt's Mubarak regime in an attempt to disrupt social media activism during the country's uprising), Gerbaudo (2013) concludes that the denial of Internet access was actually associated with increasing the size of the street protests because greater numbers of people now went there out of curiosity. This might then suggest that social media was not essential for sustaining the Egyptian uprising or that social media indirectly motivated people to participate in street protests (perhaps

another form of public sphere) through their absence. Chapter four will also discuss contradictory empirical research by Dubai School of Government (2011a) which implies that social media was an effective public sphere and organisational/communicational tool during the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. The study of Dubai School of Government (2011a) involved the completion of surveys by 126 respondents from Egypt and 105 from Tunisia.

Additional research by Dubai School of Government (2011b), mentioned in chapter four, supports the above results with respect to Facebook, although it should be noted that Dubai School of Government (2011c) presented limited data related to Egyptian females. However, the questions asked in the survey are not relevant to this thesis. In a later publication, Dubai School of Government (2012) included some references to Egyptians yet most of the questions were not related to the research of this thesis, such as issues of citizenship and identity. Finally, it should also be noted that chapter four will include authors who critically reviewed previous literature in order to arrive at conclusions without the support of their own empirical research (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Petersen, 2011; Khamis et al, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2015; Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015).

2.5 CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER TWO

In order that a theoretical framework could be established to guide the research of this thesis, the theory of the public sphere was critically examined in chapter one and then applied to social media. However, although the public sphere is the main theory which underpins this research, the theory of technological determinism was discussed here in chapter two due to its perceived relevance to and compatibility with the public sphere. Similarly, the theory of electronic colonialism (as a sub-category

of technological determinism) and the opposing claims of the theory of technological and cultural appropriation were also reviewed in this chapter. The arguments of both the supporters and the opponents of these different theories were critically examined in order to establish a theoretical framework that could later be tested. This test will later be carried out by comparing this thesis's empirical findings with the claims of the various authors through a detailed qualitative analysis.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed in this chapter and the previous chapter suggests there is a gap in our understanding of the role played by social media during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Although this theme attracted a large amount of attention in the literature, the contributions provided do not offer a conclusive interpretation of the role played by social media. This is partly due to the fact that most contributions were not supported by empirical work, and partly to the fact that the few studies which did report some form of empirical support reached contradictory conclusions. Finally, very few studies actually explored directly the perceptions of Egyptian and Tunisian Nationals. Therefore, this project was aimed at filling this gap by exploring the role played by social media during the uprisings, in terms of their contribution to the public sphere as well as their communicative and organisational function. In order to achieve this research aim an appropriate research methodology had to be conducted, and so in the following chapter the methodology of the thesis is explained in terms of its design and implementation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER THREE

The purpose of chapter three is for the researcher to set out his research design prior to its implementation. Firstly, the sequencing of this research will be explained in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the logical research steps that were undertaken in the research design. This will then allow the aims of this methodology to be clarified along with an overview of the methodological tools to be used. Thereafter the researcher will discuss the reasoning for the use of semi-structured interviews as the selected qualitative research for this thesis, along with the justification for the inclusion of previous Twitter studies. From this, the researcher will provide details of how and why this methodology was deemed most appropriate. Next, the researcher will clarify the steps taken in designing the interview questions as well as the guiding principles to be adopted whilst conducting the interviews. This will be followed by an outlining of the ethical issues faced by the researcher.

The last section in this chapter will justify and explain the researcher's use of thematic analysis as the chosen method for organising and analysing the interview findings. The researcher will provide an overview of the benefits of thematic analysis as an approach and then a discussion will take place which will demonstrate how the data generated from the interviews was coded prior to being placed into initial themes. It will also be explained in detail how these initial themes (where the data relevant to answering the research questions as well as the aims of this thesis were organised according to relevant patterns) were refined into a reduced number of main

themes. These main themes, along with their sub-themes, represent the final stage of thematic mapping for this thesis and are listed at the end of this chapter. However, the findings of this research, as categorised according to these themes and sub-themes, will be presented and fully explained in Chapter Five.

3.1 THE METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS USED

With regard to methodology, content analysis was considered as a methodological tool. This is a technique that enables the particular characteristics of messages to be identified in an objective and systematic manner (Holsti, 1969). Thus, the content analysis of social media messages can reveal the practical use of that social media (during a selected period of time) (Hara & Shachaf, 2008). ‘Conceptual’ content analysis can be applied to establish the frequency of certain words in the messages, and then ‘relational’ content analysis can examine the relationships between these words and the messages (Matthes & Kohring, 2008).

Conceptual and relational content analysis were considered by this researcher for a number of Facebook pages, and these were to be the pages of various opposition activists and pro-regime supporters from both Tunisia and Egypt. Attempts were also be made to choose Facebook pages that were fair representations of the two regimes’ opponents and supporters. With regard to Tunisia, the period 18th December 2010 until 18th January 2011 was chosen to be investigated. This includes the start date of the Tunisian uprising (18th December, 2010) and the date of departure of the dictator, Ben Ali (14th January 2011). With regard to Egypt, the period 20th January 2011 until 20th February 2011 was chosen. This includes the start of the Egyptian uprising (25th January 2011) and the date of Hosni Mubarak’s resignation (11th February 2011). Once the data from each Facebook cohort had been collected, they could then be

coded according to a number of variables and analysed. The findings could then be presented in terms of pie charts, bar charts and a table. Yet, when the researcher attempted to access Facebook pages for these periods, they appeared to be no longer available. Therefore, despite having drawn up lists of variables, it was decided that content analysis could not be carried out and so this method was not adopted.

Social network analysis (SNA) was also considered an inappropriate methodology for this research. Usually depicted through social network diagrams, SNA focuses on the ties and relationships between individuals (Serrat, 2009). However, although the inter-personal ties and relationships between social media users were briefly discussed in the literature review, this is just one small aspect among many others that were reviewed. Importantly, the main focus of this research is not to investigate interpersonal ties and relationships. Rather, the aim of this research is to examine the effectiveness of Facebook and Twitter as media tools, especially with regard to their role (if any) in generating social and political change during the uprisings. Furthermore, it has also been argued that the terminology in SNA literature is often vague, highly complex and impractical (Ball, 2009).

In addition, the researcher's original intention was also to carry out qualitative research through one-to-one semi-structured interviews or, alternatively, via group forums (Hannan and McKenzie, 2007). These participants were to be government officials and social media activists so that the perceptions and social media activity of these relevant actors could be investigated in detail (Psychology Press, 2004). However, it has since been recognised that eliciting information from government officials is likely to have a number of drawbacks. For example, officials might be unwilling to divulge sensitive data while documented information would probably be

sparse. Likewise, quantitative research in the form of survey questionnaires was initially selected in order to be part of a mixed methodology that could increase the breadth of the research. Yet the low number of just sixty-six respondents in total meant that this method also had to be abandoned due to concerns over low external validity and poor reliability.

Similarly, although it was likely that some officials and activists might be wary of speaking honestly for fear of reprisals from the authorities, it was thought that this concern was greater in relation to government officials. This greater concern felt by some officials arose simply because they actually worked for the government, and their motives were uncertain. Indeed, this researcher could also have put himself at personal risk if he had met with officials who were suspicious of him, especially if he visited them at a private or isolated location. Therefore, the decision was made not to approach government officials in either Tunisia or Egypt.

With regard to Tunisia, activists in Tunisia were contacted and invited to participate in this research. This is because Tunisia was able to implement democratic elections very quickly, and the transition has been relatively peaceful and successful, compared to the other Arab nations. The relatively stable democracy that now functions in Tunisia has even seen a few activists appointed to government positions. For example, Slim Amamou became the Minister for Youth and Sport (Christafis, 2011). In terms of Egypt, the researcher initially intended to interview Egyptians based in his home country of Saudi Arabia. However, when these potential respondents changed their minds and decided not to participate, the researcher was obliged to travel to Egypt. There, he was able to complete a number of interviews with high profile editors, journalists, politicians, activists, and a movie director.

In total, the researcher interviewed six respondents in Tunisia and fifteen in Egypt. Additionally, thirty-three Tunisians responded to the survey questionnaire with regard to Tunisia and thirty-three Egyptians responded to the survey questionnaire relating to Egypt, thereby generating a total of sixty six completed survey questionnaires. However this relatively low number of survey questionnaires implies low external validity; that is, low reliability in generalising the findings to the wider population is implied. Therefore, although the results and statistical analyses of the survey questionnaires are available in the appendix, they do not form a part of this research methodology. Instead, the researcher has chosen to focus on the qualitative research of semi-structured interviews, supported by the findings of previous Twitter studies, as the research methodology for this thesis.

The disparity in the two interview quantities was not intentional, as great efforts were made to achieve a more equal balance between them. However, due to the political sensitivity of the researcher's thesis topic, many potential respondents refused to participate despite being invited to do so. Even the researcher's assurances that the respondents' identity would remain anonymous did not convince most to participate. Yet the overall split of six-fifteen is considered satisfactory, especially as the intention is to support the interviews with the use of data/findings from a number of Twitter studies. A more detailed explanation of this thesis's methods, along with their justifications for use, is given below in the following sections.

3.2 THE JUSTIFICATION FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a method that focuses on allowing respondents to express themselves with a good degree of freedom (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2008). Therefore, the typical options available to the researcher include methods such as ethnography,

group forums, or interviews etc. This suggests that a qualitative approach is considered most appropriate for this thesis, especially since the personal thoughts and opinions of respondents are required. The nature of this dissertation also requires that these personal thoughts and opinions should be as genuine, as detailed, and as informative as possible. After all, it is the respondents' own insights into the uprisings that will provide the researcher with the information to answer the research questions. Thus, it is clear that deep and high-quality responses from the respondents are best achieved if they have the opportunity to speak openly and frankly (Hannan & McKenzie, 2007).

Ethnography is a useful qualitative method because this is where the researcher can immerse himself in a particular community, whether this is a social community (such as the researcher living in a particular town) or an organisational community (such as the researcher working within a particular company or business) (Hammersley & Atkins, 2007). However, whilst this approach may enable the researcher to gather quality information in the form of observations and experiences that arise from being an integral member of such a community, this is also a very time-consuming method. In fact, not only is the time required for effective ethnography deemed to be beyond the scope of this research, the information gathered would tend to focus on the one community. Given the time and cost restraints of this dissertation, plus the need for perceptions on Facebook and Twitter to be attained from multiple sources, ethnography was not selected by the researcher. Besides, there are also likely to be issues of gaining permission for such an intrusive research method, especially on such a sensitive political issue as the Arab uprisings.

Group forums were also considered by the researcher, which would mean gathering a number of respondents together for group discussions. On the one hand, this approach appears quite appealing because the comments of one respondent can often trigger thoughts or memories in another respondent. The quality of information that is elicited from the respondents has the potential of being of a higher standard, often because it takes the form of storytelling (Ryfe, 2006). However, the researcher's main concern again comes back to the issue of sensitivity, even physical danger, which may be associated with the Arab uprisings. This means that group forums may actually have the opposite of the desired effect, since respondents feel too uncomfortable in the presence of others. The feeling of unease, even of fear, would then cause respondents not to speak freely or not to participate at all. Therefore, this researcher rejected the method of group forums, and the decision was made to adopt an approach whereby respondents could be spoken to individually.

Bearing in mind the above, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with a number of respondents from both Tunisia and Egypt. With respect to the selection of interviewees, the intention was to attain high quality information from individuals who were particularly knowledgeable regarding the role of social media during the two countries' uprisings. Therefore, the aim was to speak with a range of interviewees, whether friends or people that I had never met before, who were activists at the time of the uprisings or who were employed or directly involved in the media industry. It is believed that interviews were the most suitable method because respondents could be spoken to on an individual basis and within a comfortable setting. Structured interviews were not selected because this is a highly restrictive method aimed at eliciting focused responses to specific questions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). Instead, semi-structured interviews were conducted

in order to introduce flexibility into the discussion. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher is still able to control the questioning, the pace, and the direction of the conversation. However the researcher may also allow himself and the respondent the freedom to speak about other issues, with the researcher even asking unplanned questions. This can be useful for attaining a better and much wider understanding of the issues at stake, especially if the respondent mentions topics or relevant views that were unexpected or not previously considered by the researcher. These topics and views can then be explored rather than be ignored, thereby adding detail and depth to the research (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008).

An important challenge faced by the researcher was to gain the trust of the respondents. This was not easy to achieve with such a research topic as most respondents were wary of participating, and this became evident when my potential respondents in Saudi Arabia withdrew from the interviews. Similarly, when numerous emails were sent to various individuals inviting them to participate, only a small percentage actually replied to the emails and phone calls. However, through perseverance and patience, the researcher was able to carry out fifteen interviews in Egypt and six interviews in Tunisia. These respondents, comprising national newspaper editors, TV presenters, journalists, politicians, activists, a professor, and a movie director, were of a very high quality. They shared a wealth of knowledge and personal experiences with the researcher, bringing depth and detail to this research.

Thus gaining the trust of these participants was important to the success of the interviewing process. Indeed, it has been noted that participants should have trust in the researcher in order for them to express themselves openly. It has also been suggested by theorists that respondents answer questions with a greater degree of

promptness and accuracy when they trust the researcher. Thus, it is important that the researcher make great efforts to relax the participants, as this will improve the quality of the information elicited (Cho, & Trent, 2006).

Of course, it is recognised by the researcher that qualitative research (such as interviews) has a number of disadvantages. For example, it is a method that lacks rigour in terms of detailed numerical and statistical measurements (Cresswell, 2013). This means it can be criticised for not providing mathematically-based accuracy, which also makes it difficult to carry out reliable comparisons with other studies. In other words, the lack of standardised and numerically measurable procedures, leads to interpretations that are highly reliant upon the researcher himself. Hence, using interviews to gather information and analyse the findings, is a relatively subjective method because the researcher can easily influence these procedures. The implication to be drawn from this is that the researcher could present an analysis which has been deliberately manipulated to conform to a particular conclusion (Psychology Press, 2004). Also, relying on the personal interpretive skills of the researcher (as opposed to a standardised method) could introduce inaccuracy into the findings and analysis if the researcher has weak or insufficient interpretive skills (Cho & Trent, 2006).

A further disadvantage of adopting interviews as a research method is that a large number of interviews need to be completed in order to increase the chances of research validity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). However, with a sensitive issue such as the Arab uprisings, it was not possible to conduct a large number of interviews because of the lack of willing participants and also due to the time constraints of this

thesis. Nonetheless, interviews will be used in this research in order to elicit high quality and detailed information from multiple sources.

3.3 THE JUSTIFICATION FOR USING PREVIOUS TWITTER STUDIES

In terms of Twitter usage (from December 2010 to February 2011) there are plenty of research papers that have already analysed this data in detail. These include Lotan *et al* (2011), Dubai School of Government 2 (2011), Dubai School of Government 3 (2012) and Choudary *et al* (2012). Furthermore, Yette (2012) has undertaken a content analysis of Twitter use for the period. This suggests these research papers can be referred to and drawn upon because their findings are reliable and they are also relevant to the answering of this thesis's research questions.

In the chapter 'The social and political context of the Arab uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt' (Chapter Four), these previous Twitter studies will be examined in some detail. This previous research is considered reliable and, along with a discussion of Lotan *et al* (2011), Dubai School of Government 2 (2011), Dubai School of Government 3 (2012) and Choudary *et al* (2012), graphs related to Twitter usage activity will be shown as generated by Dubai School of Government 2 (2011). The reliability of these studies can be recognised in the depth and quality of their investigations, and so their findings and conclusions will be used to support this thesis.

3.4 JUSTIFICATION FOR SELECTED RESEARCH DESIGN

In the previous chapter of the literature review, the two research questions for this thesis were generated. Therefore the purpose of the research design in this chapter of the methodology has been to establish a framework that has the optimal prospects for answering these research questions. Initially, as discussed above, the researcher intended that his main methodological tool would be that of content analysis. However, when it became impossible to access content for the relevant early periods of the Tunisian and Egyptian Uprisings, the researcher sought to identify alternative methods (Black, 2006). Therefore semi-structured interviews were selected as the main methodological tool because this allowed the participants' behaviour, opinions, values and beliefs (as constructed by the influencing surroundings of the participants' society, culture, family and friends) to be understood in detail (Cresswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to elicit high quality information, which then assisted in his epistemological intention to identify knowledge of the uprisings in terms of its validity, its composition and how it was obtained (Marsh and Furlong, 2002).

The researcher used semi-structured interviews as the main method for this methodology because it was deemed reasonable that the societal and cultural influences of social media users' perceptions (who were both Arab and Muslim) should be investigated in detail. This is particularly appropriate since the cultural, societal, religious and traditional influences on Arab Muslim communities (such as Tunisia and Egypt) are great. As a researcher who is concerned with the personal experiences, feelings, behaviour and actions of social media users during the two countries' uprisings, I was persuaded that semi-structured interviews were most suitable for answering the two research questions. Given the advantages and

disadvantages of qualitative research (as discussed previously in this chapter), the researcher initially intended to adopt a mixed method through the supportive quantitative method of survey questionnaires. However, although such a supportive quantitative method has the potential for being relatively objective and of generating measurable statistical data, the low number of survey questionnaires that were actually completed by respondents meant that this method had to be abandoned. Therefore, the researcher decided to adopt thematic analysis (as justified and explained in the ‘Adoption of thematic analysis for the interview findings’ section below) for the interview findings.

3.5 DESIGNING THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In designing the interview questions, it was essential that careful consideration be given to the research questions. This was necessary because the research questions had been generated from the literature review, and so answering the research questions would allow the researcher to investigate the aims of this thesis. Of course it is recognised that the interviews are intended to form just one part of the methodology because data from previous Twitter studies will also generate findings (that will be analysed in order to answer the research questions). However, the interview questions are a crucial aspect of the overall methodology, primarily because they have been specifically designed to produce answers to the literature review queries.

In addition to being generated from the literature review and the research questions, the interview questions were also categorised into topics. Again, these topics were designed to assist the researcher in achieving the aims of this thesis. Initially, the respondents were asked a number of general questions in order to start the discussion

and to help them open up and focus on the subsequent important subjects of the research. These initial questions were listed beneath (A) 'General questions' and were drawn up to provide answers to general issues of the uprisings, to elicit information regarding the background to the uprisings, and to begin exploratory questions with respect to Facebook and Twitter.

The second heading relates to the topic (B) 'Facebook and Twitter as a public sphere for activism'. Therefore, the questions under this topic heading were designed to answer research question number one, which was:

1) To what extent did social media provide Tunisians and Egyptians with an effective public sphere for generating social and political change during the uprisings in these two countries?

By helping to answer this first research question, the interview questions under this topic heading will examine the claims of writers such as Shirky (2011) and Castells (2012). These writers have argued that social media provided the Arabs with a forum where political discussions and criticisms of the ruling regime could take place. Proponents of this idea (that social media provided the activists and the general Arab population with a public sphere) often refer to the classical works of Habermas (1984; 1991) for their theoretical foundation. Furthermore, the questions under this topic heading will also investigate a number of important issues that are related to the concept of the public sphere. These include the debate over whether or not social media is a public sphere where political discussions can persuade people to change their opinions, and thereby encourage people to join the street protests. For, whereas writers such as Shirky (2011) and Bowman and Vela (2011) believe social media is an opinion-changing public sphere, there are others who disagree (Gladwell, 2011;

Morozov, 2011). For instance, Dajani (2011) argues that social media tends to strengthen existing opinions rather than change them, and he also claims that the traditional public sphere is more important to Arabs than social media. In other words, he considers the face-to-face spoken word at places such as the Mosque and the coffee houses to be more relevant than digital communication. Therefore, in order to examine these claims through interviews, the interview questions were created.

The next topic heading is (C) 'Facebook and Twitter as organisational tools for activists,' and the questions were designed to answer the second research question.

The second research question is stated as:

2) How important was social media as an organisational and communications tool for Tunisians and Egyptians during the uprisings in these two countries?

This research question, as well as the interview questions under this topic, is intended to examine the claims of those writers who proposed that Facebook and Twitter were crucial for helping the Arab activists to plan and organise their activities during the uprisings (Ghannem, 2011; Joseph, 2011; Castells, 2012; Khamis et al, 2012). An assessment can also be made of conflicting remarks made by others, such as Gladwell (2011) who argue that social media activists actually tend to be unorganised with poor planning. This is because they are said to lack a clear hierarchy and effective leadership (Gladwell, 2011).

The final topic heading is (D) 'The role of Facebook and Twitter in generating social/political change,' and the questions that were listed under this topic were designed to investigate this issue. These interview questions were drawn up to investigate the validity of theories such as technological determinism. So-called

technological determinists, who may be considered to include writers such as McLuhan (1967), Castells (2012), and Khamis et al (2012), suggest that new media technologies will bring social and political change. So this means that technological determinism supports the idea that Facebook and Twitter, as new media technologies, will also generate social and political change in Tunisia and Egypt. Bearing in mind the title and the aims of this thesis, the questions under this subject heading (with their investigation of the relevance of technological determinism) are extremely relevant.

3.6 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

In order to conduct the interviews, the researcher travelled to Saudi Arabia on 15th January 2014. A number of potential respondents had been prepared beforehand, yet these respondents changed their minds upon my arrival in the country and said they no longer wanted to participate. This withdrawal of the respondents highlights a major problem with this type of research. This is the problem of fear among many Arabs in relation to discussing political issues, especially political issues related to rebellion against Arab dictators in the region.

In order to find new respondents, the researcher contacted his university supervisor in the UK and gained permission to travel to Egypt and Tunisia in order to carry out the research. Thereafter the researcher travelled to Alexandria in Egypt and spent a period of 10 days in the city. The researcher then travelled to Cairo, the capital of Egypt, and stayed there for a further 20 days. This meant that the country's two largest cities were visited. Potentially new participants were identified due to their prominence within various fields of Egyptian media, and these were contacted by email and by phone. From the many that were contacted, the overwhelming majority

did not respond. However 15 of those contacted did respond, and these 15 who were interviewed were all of a very high calibre. These Egyptian respondents were a mixture of newspaper editors, TV presenters, activists, journalists, politicians, and even a movie director. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were carried out across a section of both Mubarak's supporters and his opponents.

Among those who were interviewed were the presenter of Alexandria's regional TV station 'Five', the editor of the leading national daily newspaper 'Al Wafd', and journalists from other national newspapers. The editor of the newspaper and media company, 'Al Watan', was also interviewed, as well as Bothaina Kamel who was a female candidate in the 2012 Presidential elections. She is now a famous political commentator on Egyptian TV. In addition, the giant Saudi Arabian TV and newspaper corporation 'MBC' has studios and offices in Cairo, and so the researcher also visited this site. At this multi-media corporation, the leading presenter, Mohmoud Al Werwary, was interviewed.

Whilst still in Cairo, the researcher travelled to 'October Six' which is a huge media production city and the largest media site in the Arab world. All of Egypt's TV companies have studios and offices here, and the researcher had to gain an appointment in order to be granted access through security. Over a period of 4-5 days, six interviews were carried out with various managers and political commentators. After these had been completed, the researcher also carried out interviews with a number of Egyptian political parties. These included an official representative from An Nur Party (which was the political party that had formed a government of alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood) and Al Adala (a smaller national political party). Finally a movie director and several activists were

interviewed in Egypt, after which the researcher flew to the Tunisian capital of Tunis. The researcher spent 10 days there and interviewed five Tunisian activists at Al Manar University. Professor Abdel Latif Khemakhem was also interviewed. He had been a personal advisor to Bourgaiba, the man who had been the President of Tunisia before Ben Ali.

3.7 ETHICAL ISSUES

I provided an Information/Invitation Form (outlining my research) to potential interviewees and, if they were agreeable to participation, I then provided them with a Consent Form (for their completion). When the interviews were conducted, they were recorded on a recording device. Later, I played back the recorder and made hand-written notes on the key parts of the interviews. I then analysed these notes for themes and relationships. The recording device, all hand written notes, all data, and all other information related to my project are kept securely at my home within a locked cabinet. My laptop computer and USB memory stick were encrypted for extra security. No names or personal information (such as email addresses) were recorded by me and every set of interview notes that I wrote were all anonymous.

3.8 THE ADOPTION OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS FOR THE INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Thematic analysis was selected for the interview findings because it has the following advantages of particular relevance to this thesis:

- ❖ Its rigorous application can generate detailed insight in order to answer the research questions.
- ❖ Its flexible approach may be used with a variety of different epistemologies.

- ❖ It can describe and summarise important aspects from a large quantity of data.
- ❖ Attention can be drawn to those parts of the data where there are significant similarities or differences.
- ❖ Insights that were not anticipated may be generated (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

It should also be noted that the researcher uses the term ‘data corpus’ with respect to the total amount of combined data that was gathered from all of the interviews, all of the previous studies and all of the abandoned survey questionnaires put together. On the other hand, the term ‘data set’ is used to refer to a collation of particular ‘data items’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is where a data item relates to each individual interviewee who was interviewed for this particular study, whilst the data set relates to all the Tunisian and Egyptian interviewees who participated in this qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews. Finally, the term ‘data extract’ is used when referring to quotations of the interviewees since these quotations have been *extracted* from the data items of the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Bearing in mind the advantages that were outlined above, as well as the research terms that were defined above, the researcher accepts there is no consensus as to how thematic analysis should be carried out in practice (Bazeley, 2013). Nonetheless it is an approach which incorporates a number of general steps and this enabled the data set of this thesis to be organised, described and interpreted in a methodical and minimalistic manner (Bazeley, 2013). In particular, thematic analysis assisted the researcher in the identification, analysis and the reporting of patterns (themes) that existed across the data set (Guest et al, 2012). Therefore the themes of this thesis did not ‘emerge’ passively and nor were they ‘discovered’ in some type of passive

manner; but rather the researcher played an active role in the identification of patterns/themes, choosing those that were of interest and relevance to the thesis, and then reporting these back to the reader.

During this process of identifying and selecting themes, the researcher decided that a theme should be one which captures something significant from the data with regard to the research questions. Yet each theme should also represent a degree of patterned meaning from the data set (Guest et al, 2012). However, when deciding what should justify the establishment of a pattern/theme so that coding could be initiated, the decision was made that a rigid rule or percentage (such as the pattern/theme being discussed or being given significant attention by over 50% of the data items) should not be the criterion. Instead the researcher retained some flexibility in choosing the themes because, although prevalence in terms of the number of different data items highlighting a particular theme was taken into consideration, a theme could be created due to its crucial significance in answering a research question even if it was mentioned by only one data item. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10):

‘The ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question’.

In addition, the approach taken by the researcher in identifying the patterns/themes from within the data set can be described as corresponding to a theoretical (deductive/top down) thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is because the researcher’s theoretical framework, as set out in the literature review of chapters one and two, is what drives both the coding (for answering the research questions) as well as the analysis of this thesis’s findings. Furthermore, the researcher’s approach

is semantic since he was not looking for anything beyond what each interviewee actually said during the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process of analysis was one that progressed from data description towards data organisation where patterns were organised according to semantic content (i.e. meaning). These semantic themes were then summarised and interpreted (in Chapter Five) prior to a later phase (set out in the analysis and discussion of Chapter Six) where the significant patterns were analytically theorised in terms of their broader meanings and implications. Finally, the thematic analysis of this thesis was conducted within the research epistemology of essentialism/realism because the researcher attempted to theorise the meanings, experiences and motivations of the interviewees in a manner that was relatively straight forward (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

With regard to the actual steps that were taken during the process of thematic analysis, the researcher began to notice potential patterns of meaning, as well as issues of relevance and interest, whilst carrying out the interviews. Therefore, some initial ideas and some early possible coding schemes were jotted down, and in fact this continual writing of notes continued throughout all of the coding and analysis process (Saldana, 2012). However, it was only after the transcripts of the entire data set had been written up that the researcher was able to fully familiarise himself with the data. By repeatedly reading through the data set in order to identify meanings and patterns, it then became possible to start the formal coding process. This is where codes (each consisting of a single word or a very short phrase) were generated for the purpose of identifying interesting features of the (semantic) data and organising selected data extracts into meaningful coded groups (Saldana, 2012).

Yet the coded data were different from the initial themes that were developed during the next step of thematic analysis because, whereas the codes were titles for every *single* extract of meaningful data from each data item, the initial themes were subsequently created as brief summarising titles for each *group* of coded data extracts that had been collated together (Saldana, 2012). It should be further noted that, although most of the initial themes were titles given to chunks of data extracts which were also coded and which had been thematically grouped together according to patterns or similar meanings, the researcher also sometimes created an initial theme for a single (coded) data extract if he regarded it as being of significant interest. This approach was applied even if the single (coded) data extract of interest departed from the dominant story of the main analysis of the thesis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In order to create all the initial themes, the names of the various codes (along with their brief descriptions) had been written onto separate pieces of paper and then these pieces of paper were moved around until they became organised into numerous piles of different initial themes. Hence, these piles of initial themes became the researcher's initial thematic map (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thereafter, bearing in mind the research questions and the aims of this study, the researcher established a reduced number of relevant main themes by eliminating or combining together these initial themes. This process of refinement (thematic mapping) was then repeated many times until a small number of main themes, along with sub-themes for each of these main themes, had been assembled into a final thematic map (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Diagrams of the thematic maps, along with the final main themes and their sub-themes, are presented and discussed in the Findings Chapter.

3.9 CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER THREE

Chapter Three has set out the research design for this thesis, where it has been explained why a variety of methods was considered (such as content analysis, SNA, ethnography and group forums) and then rejected due to their unsuitability. It was also explained that the researcher initially decided to adopt a mixed methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews, survey questionnaires, and references to existing Twitter studies. However, since only 33 Tunisians and 33 Egyptians completed the survey questionnaires, this particular method was abandoned due to issues of low reliability and low external validity. Therefore the use of semi-structured interviews and references to existing Twitter studies were adopted as the research methodology for this thesis.

This chapter is important because it sets out the approach to be undertaken in order that the research questions can later be answered. The utilisation of semi-structured interviews has also been identified as most appropriate for generating findings that can be related back to the literature review in a relatively straightforward manner. Of course, it is also borne in mind that undertaking such sensitive research (within two countries that are currently undergoing political transition) means that care should be taken in carrying this out. This is an ethical issue that influences the researcher's attitude and approach towards conducting the methodology, bringing a degree of restriction as discussed in this chapter.

Finally, the last section in this chapter provided the reader with a detailed overview of the researcher's reasoning for choosing the method of thematic analysis for organising and analysing the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. In particular, a clear insight was given as to the steps that were taken in order for this

data to be coded and then carefully themed into an initial thematic map. It was also explained how the thematic map was repeatedly refined through a process of eliminating or combining themes until a final thematic map was developed. Since this final thematic map of main themes and their sub-themes represents the manner by which the findings of this research will be presented in the Findings Chapter, it was deemed important that the process by which they were accumulated and organised should be set out in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS IN TUNISIA AND EGYPT

4.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER FOUR

In this chapter four, the actual events of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings are examined. This is considered necessary so that these events can be related back to the theoretical discussions within the literature review, which then allows the researcher to test the validity of these claims through an analysis of the actual events. In particular, this chapter sets out to reveal essential information regarding the state of the public spheres within the social and political contexts of Tunisia and Egypt. This is in relation to the conventional media and public space as well as to new, social media. In terms of sequencing, the events of the Tunisian uprising will first be reviewed along with a discussion of it. Attention will also be given to applying the theory to the dictator's dilemma in Tunisia, as well as assessing the validity of those who have described the events as a 'Twitter Revolution' and a 'Facebook Revolution'. Finally, with regard to Tunisia, other factors will be considered and reviewed.

With respect to the Egyptian uprising, the events will also be examined first. Thereafter, a discussion will take place concerning the period immediately after Mubarak's resignation in order to assess this transition period. This will then enable the researcher to offer comments on the Egyptian uprising and so carry out a wider discussion of the Egyptian uprising. Finally, given that the focus of this thesis is to study the social and political impact of the uprising, it is logical that the traditional role of women in these Islamic countries should be reviewed in order to identify any

changes or developments. Therefore, the social media and women during the uprisings will be examined, followed by an investigation of the influential women of the uprisings. This chapter will then be finalised with a conclusion where the main issues will be summarised and clarified.




4.1 THE MEDIA IN TUNISIA & EGYPT

In Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali assumed the Presidency in 1987 following a coup. He then secured power by fixing elections, each time granting himself more than 90% of the vote. He remained President of Tunisia until he was forced out of office in January 2011 during the Arab ‘spring’ uprising (Logan, 2012). Similarly, Muhammad Hosni El Sayed Mubarak assumed the presidency of Egypt in 1981, following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. Like Ben Ali, Mubarak also fixed the election results, and he remained in power until forced to resign in February 2011 as the Arab ‘spring’ uprising spread to Egypt (Arafat, 2012). Ben Ali and Mubarak followed the same media strategy of maintaining tight control over the mass media in their countries (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

From the 1990s, Al Jazeera astonished its viewers because it was so (relatively) liberal in its outlook and unlike any other Arabic-language TV programming in its criticisms of certain Arab regimes (Miles, 2006). In response, Arab Governments launched their own satellite channels in order to promote their personal agendas (Pintak, 2008). However, the arrival and expansive use of the Internet raised the social, political and global awareness of the Arabs, increasing a desire for political freedom and human rights (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Seib, 2012). This has been referred to as the Westernising effect on the Arabs (Golan, 2010).

On the eve of the Tunisian uprising (December 2010) and the beginning of the Arab ‘spring’, Facebook penetration in Tunisia was 17.55% of the population. Therefore, although this percentage was not as high as a number of oil rich Gulf countries, it was by far the highest percentage from among the poorer North African countries. As shown in Table One below, this represented 1.8 million people (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Interestingly, this relatively high Facebook penetration in Tunisia was also combined with a poverty headcount of 15.5% in 2010 and GNI per capita of \$4,070 in 2010 (World Bank, 2012). The GNI per capita is the gross national income, converted to US dollars, divided by the midyear population.

Table 1: Facebook Users and Country Population in the Arab World (Dec 2010)

Country 	Numbers of Facebook users 	Population 	Facebook penetration (%)
Algeria	1.413.280	35.422.589	3.99
Bahrain	276.580	807.131	34.27
Comoros	6.240	691.351	0.90
Djibouti	46.040	879.053	5.24
Egypt	4.634.600	84.474.427	5.49
Iraq	397.140	31.466.698	1.26
Jordan	1.104.340	6.472.392	17.06
Kuwait	629.700	3.050.744	20.64
Lebanon	983.380	4.254.583	23.11
Libya	260.400	6.545.619	3.98
Mauritania	40.000	3.365.675	1.19
Morocco	2.446.300	32.381.283	7.55
Oman	219.320	2.905.114	7.55
Palestine	474.400	4.409.392	10.76
Qatar	512.060	1.508.322	33.95
Saudi Arabia	3.213.420	26.245.969	12.24
Somalia	6.940	9.133.124	0.08
Sudan	319.624	43.192.438	0.74
Syria	241.859	22.505.091	1.07
Tunisia	1.820.880	10.373.957	17.55
UAE	2.135.960	4.707.307	45.38
Yemen	179.400	24.255.928	0.74

Source: Dubai School of Government (2011)

In Egypt, Facebook penetration was 5.49% (4.6 million people) in December 2010 (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Also the poverty headcount was 22.0% (as at 2008) and GNI per capita was \$2,600 in 2011 (World Bank, 2012). Also, by April 2011 (about 4 months after the start of the Arab uprisings) Facebook penetration had reached 22.49% in Tunisia, as compared to 17.55% in December 2010. In addition, for the same period, it had increased from 5.49% to 7.66% within Egypt. However, as per Figure 2, Twitter penetration is far lower. The average (from January 2011 to March 2011) was just 0.34% in Tunisia and 0.15% in Egypt (Dubai School of Government 2, 2011).

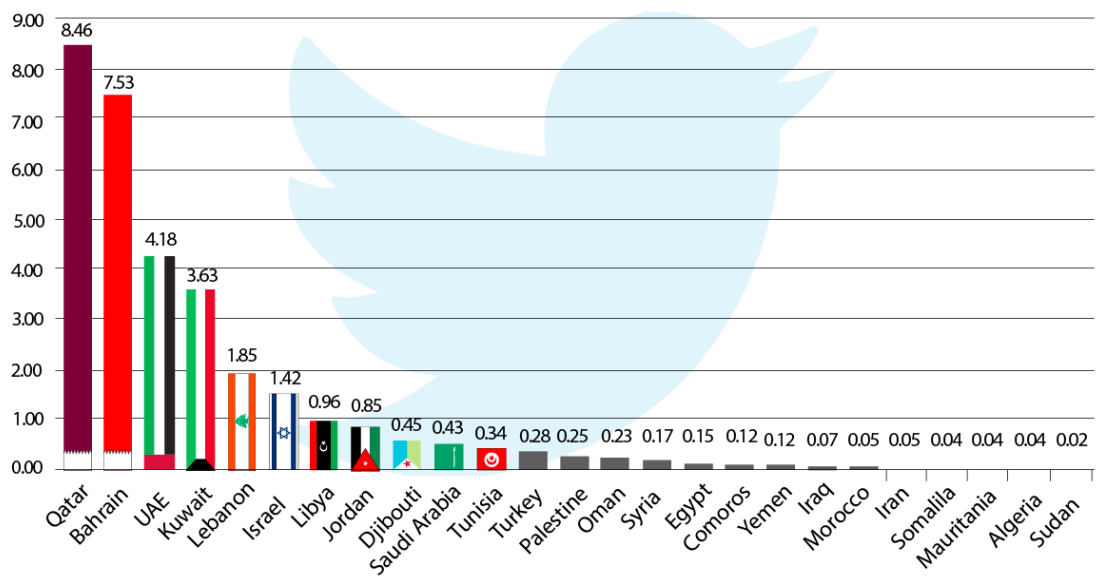


Figure 2: Twitter Penetration in the Arab Region (Average Jan 1 - March 30, 2011)

Source: (Dubai School of Government 2, 2011)

4.2 CENSORSHIP POLICIES

With regard to the levels of Internet censoring and monitoring in Tunisia, Table 2 shows this was at its highest level (pervasive) with respect to political, social and Internet tools. In addition, the Tunisian government used laws, regulations, and surveillance to further enforce their control of the Internet. There were many instances when the press code was used to prosecute journalists who offended the president, who were deemed a disturbance, or who were accused of publishing false information.

Table 2: The 2009 levels of Internet censoring & monitoring in Tunisia

RESULTS AT A GLANCE					
Filtering	No evidence of filtering	Suspected filtering	Selective filtering	Substantial filtering	Pervasive filtering
Political					●
Social					●
Conflict/security			●		
Internet tools					●

Source: Open Net Initiative 1 (2009)

With regard to Egypt, Table 3 shows there was no evidence of Internet filtering across any of the themes of political, social, conflict/security and Internet tools. However, although the Mubarak regime allowed a relatively high degree of Internet freedom, Egypt still ran the "Internet Crime Department" at the Ministry of the Interior. Its function was to monitor the Internet, follow conversations in chat rooms and intercept e-mail messages (Abdulla, 2007).

Table 3: The 2009 levels of Internet censoring & monitoring in Egypt

RESULTS AT A GLANCE					
Filtering	No evidence of filtering	Suspected filtering	Selective filtering	Substantial filtering	Pervasive filtering
Political	●				
Social	●				
Conflict/security	●				
Internet tools	●				

Source: (Open Net Initiative 2, 2009)

4.3 THE EVENTS OF THE TUNISIAN UPRISING

In central Tunisia, south of the capital Tunis, there is a small, impoverished town that is home to just 40,000 people. Among these residents was a 26 year-old fruit and vegetable street vendor by the name of Mohammad Bouazizi, a man who was to become the spark that ignited the Arab uprisings. Bouazizi had been experiencing persistent harassment from the local police and their repeated confiscation of his market stall because he had refused to pay their bribes. Struggling to make a living and constantly humiliated by the police, he finally cracked under the pressure. On 17th December 2010 at eleven thirty in the morning, only one hour after the most recent confiscation, Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of government buildings. He was rushed to hospital, but he died from his injuries on 3rd January 2011 (Manhire, 2012).

However, just a few hours after Bouazizi had set himself on fire, a protest in support of him was staged by hundreds of youths in front of the same government building. They too had been ‘sharing similar experiences of humiliation by the authorities’ (Castells, 2012, p. 22). Furthermore, Bouazizi’s cousin, named Ali, recorded this

demonstration and then he put the video out onto the Internet. At the same time, there were other suicides by fire during this period, increasing the anger and determination of the country's youth to protest. Over the next few days, spontaneous street demonstrations broke out across the country and the police responded with violence and brutality (Achar, 2013). Joseph (2011) sums up the role of social media during this time, writing:

‘Videos of the Sidi Bou Zid protests were uploaded to Facebook, which, unlike other video-sharing sites, was not blocked in Tunisia....Given that print and broadcast media was controlled within Tunisia, social media served a vital role in spreading word of the uprising. A Facebook group entitled “Mr President, Tunisians are setting themselves on fire” was established, while Tunisian Twitter users spread the hashtags #bouazizi, #tunisia, and #sidibouzid to show solidarity with the protesters and to organize and galvanize country-wide protests’ (Joseph, 2011, p. 159).

Global Voices (a website that collects and reports news from social media) was one of the earliest media outlets to begin reporting on the Tunisian uprising. Several days later, by 30th December 2011, the website reported that news from social media about the Tunisian protests was finally being reported by Al Jazeera. Yet, mainstream media from other countries had still not started their coverage of the unrest, and indeed, they were much slower to respond to the events (Joseph, 2011). Despite the police killing at least 147 protesters and injuring hundreds more, the demonstrations reached the capital by early January 2011. In response, on 12th January 2011, Ben Ali ordered the army to shoot at protesters in an attempt to crush the uprising. However, the Chief of Staff of the Tunisian Armed Forces, General Rachid Ammar, refused to

carry out the order and two days later (on 14th January) Ben Ali and his family fled the country to Saudi Arabia. The protesters, however, did not stop with the removal of Ben Ali from power. Rather, videos and messages regarding on-going street protests spread across social media and the Internet, as calls of ‘Get out! Get out!’ were now aimed at all of the country’s corrupt powers, be they politicians, police, or regime media.

‘The connection between free communication on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and the occupation of urban space created a hybrid public space of freedom that became a major feature of the Tunisian rebellion’ (Castells, 2012, p. 23).

On 22nd January 2011, the mass of protesters, known as the Convoy of Liberty, arrived in Tunis and occupied the central square where most of the government ministries are located. Tents were set up and the activists organised detailed political debates that would continue late into the night. These discussions were recorded and then spread via social media. There were several occasions when the police forcibly evicted the activists from the square, but they returned in February 2011 and again in March 2011. All political issues are said to have been discussed, including the establishment of democracy and employment creation (especially as a large proportion of the protesters were young and well-educated, yet unemployed). There were Islamists present as well as secularists, yet no major tensions existed between them because unity was achieved based on nationalism. The national flag could be seen everywhere, and the national anthem was sung regularly. They often cried out that the Tunisian uprising was a ‘Revolution for liberty and dignity’ (Achar, 2013).

In the past, Tunisia had experienced very few street demonstrations. Important protests had occurred at Ben Guerdane in 2009 and at Gafsa in 2008, but these were brutally suppressed by the Ben Ali regime with scores killed and injured. This raises the question as to how and why did the Arab uprising become so widespread, rapid, sustained, and successful? In answer to this question, Castells (2012) has suggested that the underlying causes for the uprising were issues such as authoritarianism, unemployment, poor economic and social conditions, corruption, police brutality, and censorship. However, he adds:

‘It was in the connection between social networks on the Internet and social networks in peoples’ lives where the protests were forged. Thus, the precondition for the revolts was the existence of an Internet culture, made up of bloggers, social networks and cyber-activism’ (Castells, 2012, p. 27).

In other words, social media and the Internet are said to have made the difference on this occasion.

On the other hand, it has also been argued that Al Jazeera TV was a crucial partner in the success of the Tunisian uprising. The Arabic satellite channel is an emerging giant in global media, and it supported the uprising by broadcasting sympathetic videos, images and stories of the demonstrations. In particular, it broadcast Facebook images of the early protests outside the government building where Bouazizi had set himself on fire. Therefore, Al Jazeera TV complemented social media from the beginning of the uprising, raising awareness and support across Tunisia and the rest of the Arab world.

Indeed, Ben Gharbia (a leading Tunisian activist) declared that Facebook and Al Jazeera TV were both crucial for the country’s successful uprising (Ghannam, 2011).

Throughout 2011, the Tunisian protesters continued calling for democracy to be implemented in the country. Despite continued violence from the police and the presence of old regime politicians still remaining in high positions of government, the protesters were fortunate to have the general support of the army. Also, with the further support of a newly independent media, the revolutionary movement was able to achieve open and fair democratic elections on 23rd October, 2011. These elections were then won by the moderate Islamist coalition, known as Ennahad, whose 40% share of the vote gave them 89 seats out of the 217 in the Constitutional Assembly. Their leader, Rached Gannouchi, became the prime minister, and the secular Moncef Marzuki became president. A new, secular constitution was then drawn up for the country (Manhire, 2012).

4.4 DISCUSSION OF THE TUNISIAN UPRISING

Joseph (2011) explains that the cables of the American State Department (which were leaked by Wiki-Leaks) revealed that the American and Western governments were well aware of the corruption and oppression of the Ben Ali regime. Yet, despite being aware of this corruption and oppression, the American government was content to continue its dealings with him. This is because he supported the policies of America and the West and he was an important ally for them in the region.

‘WikiLeaks stirred simmering Tunisian discontent when, in partnership with The Guardian, it released leaked U.S. State Department cables detailing the United States’ opinion of and dealings with the decades old Ben Ali regime. The cables alleged gross corruption within Ben Ali’s family and systematic oppression by the regime. In fact, TuniLeaks—a site linked with Nawaat, a Tunisian dissident site—released the leaked cables a few days earlier than

WikiLeaks. The existence of corruption was common knowledge within Tunisia, but publication of the cables brought the issue starkly into the open. This clear evidence of Western complicity in, or at least tolerance of, the egregious conduct of the Ben Ali regime sparked outrage and conversation in both real and virtual communities' (Joseph, 2011, p.158)

Joseph (2011) also remarks that it was a dissident website (TuniLeaks, which is linked to Nawaat) that first leaked the cables on to the Internet. This suggests that Tunisian opposition activists were well organised and familiar with the Internet long before the country's uprising. In fact, this is supported by Dellicastelli (2011) who wrote that:

'In Tunisia, there was a strong culture of dissident bloggers and it was, in fact, posts on a popular blog that contributed to the beginning of that uprising' (Dellicastelli, 2011, p.54).

Delicastelli (2011) further says that the activists used social media with such skill and effectiveness that the Ben Ali regime was uncertain how to react. The speed with which images and messages were passed between activists, contributing to a sudden and huge uprising across the country, caught the regime unprepared. In just a few weeks, Ben Ali had fled the country with his family.

'The Director of the Tunisian Internet Agency believes Tunisian leader Ben Ali did not realise the full extent of how the Internet was being used in that nation. And if he had realised, then he would have tried to shut it down' (Dellicastelli, 2011, p.57).

It was shown that Facebook penetration in Tunisia was 17.55% of the population in December 2010. Therefore, although this percentage was not as high as a number of oil rich Arab countries from the Gulf, it was by far the highest percentage from among the poorer Arab countries of North Africa, totalling 1.8 million people in all (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Furthermore, this relatively high Facebook penetration in Tunisia was also combined with a poverty headcount of 15.5% in 2010 and GNI per capita of \$4,070 in 2010 (World Bank, 2012). In other words, it could be argued that the conditions were ripe for an uprising in the country. There was a very young population that was highly educated and experienced in the skilful use of social media, yet they were also frustrated by unemployment, authoritarianism, poverty, a lack of opportunities, and poor social and economic conditions (Ghannam, 2011).

Importantly, during the first six months of the Tunisian uprising (from December 2010 until June 2011) Facebook penetration in the country leapt from 17.55% to an incredible 27.9% (Dubai School of Government 3, 2011). This suggests there was a strong, positive relationship between social media use on the one hand and the generation of social/political change on the other hand.

A survey by the Dubai School of Government (2011) also found the following percentages of activity by Tunisian Facebook users in March 2011:

- Organizing actions and managing activists (22.31%)
- Spreading information to the world about the civil movement (33.06%)
- Raising awareness inside the country on the movement (31.4%)
- Entertainment or other (13.22%)

(Dubai School of Government 2, 2011).

From these findings, the Dubai School survey appears to support Shirky's notion that social media generates social change in 'two steps': firstly, by providing information and enabling political conversations; secondly, by transferring activism from online to offline, and helping protesters to plan and organise their demonstrations and activities.

With regard to Twitter penetration in Tunisia, this averaged just 0.34% of the population between January and March 2011 (Dubai School of Government 2, 2011). Interestingly, the graph below (published by the Dubai School of Government 2, 2011), shows that Twitter use by Tunisians increased at the time of demonstrations and important events. For example, there was a peak in Twitter use by Tunisians on the 13th and 14th of January. The latter date was a day of mass protests in Tunisia. It was also the same day that Ben Ali left the country.

There was also an increase in Twitter use between 20th and 27th February. This was a time of more mass demonstrations in the country, and indeed on 27th February the Prime Minister, Mohammad Ghannouchi resigned. He had been the Prime Minister during the time of Ben Ali, and so the people saw him as part of the old regime. He was replaced by Beji Caid el Sebsi. Overall, therefore, this graph suggests a strong link between online and offline activism in Tunisia.

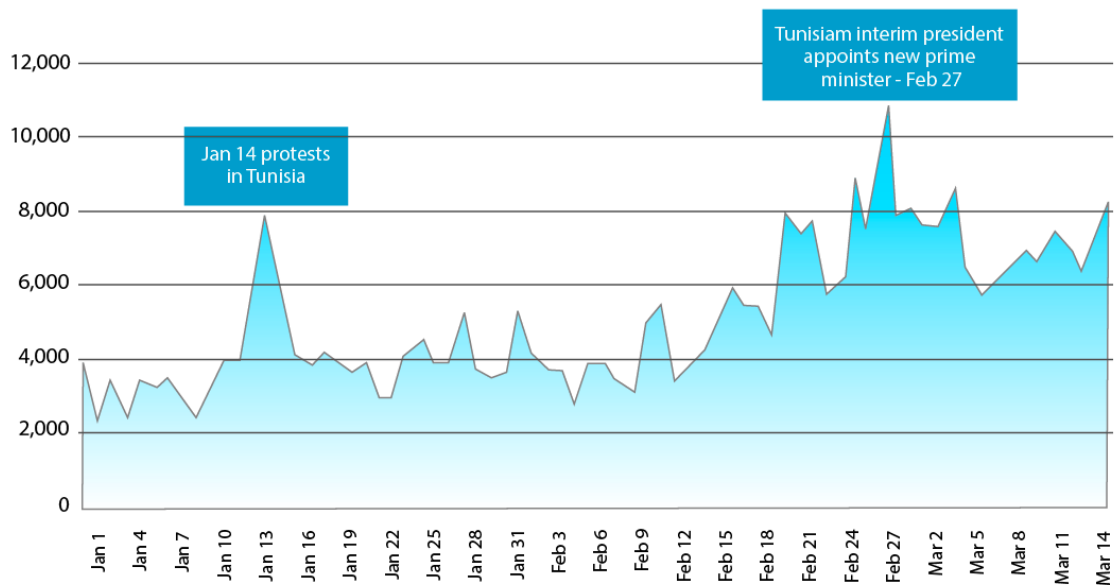


Figure 3: Volume of daily tweets in Tunisia

Source: Dubai school of Government, 2011

On this topic, the University of Washington published research by Howard et al (2011) who also analysed tweets during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. According to this study, it was found that social media was crucial for a number of reasons.

‘Social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring. A spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground. Social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders’ (Howard et al, 2011, p. 2).

Similarly, Lotan et al (2011) analysed Twitter use in Tunisia from January 12th until January 19th 2011. Again, important correlations were drawn between Twitter use on the one hand and the demonstrations and activities of the protesters on the other

hand. Their general conclusion was that Twitter had played a vital part in amplifying and disseminating important information.

Lotan et al (2011) also refer to the two-step flow theory of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) which (as discussed earlier) was also mentioned by Shirky (2011). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) found that the biggest influence on peoples' opinions did not come from traditional mass media, but from individuals (referred to as 'Opinion Leaders') with whom people regularly associated. Hence, both Lotan et al (2011) and Shirky (2011) refer back to the two-step flow theory of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) because they believe it supports the idea that personal communications have the greatest influence on our beliefs. In particular, this notion is important in confirming Shirky's belief that social media represents a new public sphere where debates will persuade people to join street protests (Shirky, 2011).

Although Lotan et al (2011) warn that much news on Twitter is subjectively written by various individuals (such as by bloggers, activists and journalists) it is still claimed that it is opinion-changing information. Lotan et al (2011) further explain that Wu et al (2011) tested the Two-Step Flow Theory on Twitter traffic by using their own Information Diffusion Models. Their results had strong similarities to the findings of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). However, it could also be argued that the 'Opinion Leaders' identified by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) are family members, close friends and work colleagues. In other words, they are the strong ties identified by Gladwell (2010) who can persuade people to change their opinions and to take risky action because they (the strong ties) are known to them personally and they can be trusted. Therefore, Gladwell (2010) and others could claim that communicating via social media does not have the same force as communicating with 'Opinion

Leaders'. This is because the people who communicate with each other on social media tend to be distant acquaintances, and these constitute only weak ties that are unlikely to persuade people to take risky action (such as joining street protests).

Nonetheless, with regard to the content of social media communications during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, Howard et al (2011) found that social media was used to spread information about liberty, revolution and freedom. There were also marked increases in revolutionary conversations immediately before major protests and demonstrations. Since messages of freedom, democracy and liberty were being spread (rather than Islamic or economic issues), the implication is that the activists were hoping for a more Westernised social/political system (Howard et al, 2011).

4.5 THE TUNISIAN UPRISING – OTHER FACTORS

As a Tunisian living in Tunisia during the early months of the country's uprising, Tufekci describes the irony of Ben Ali's tight control over the media (Carlson, 2011). It is ironic because the widespread censorship actually helped to boost use of social media across the country. For example, Tufekci explains that journalists were prevented from visiting Sidi Bouzid to report on the protests there, and that the state-controlled media simply described events there as being due to vandals or terrorists (Carlson, 2011). Therefore, aware that the mainstream media was being heavily censored by the regime, Tunisians increasingly turned to social media as a source of alternative news. In particular, Facebook usage grew rapidly during this period, due in part to its easy access and two-way means of communication. Unlike traditional media, where information is delivered one-way from the source to the recipient, Facebook allowed information to be spread in different directions. As well as receiving information on Facebook, users could also create, share, and exchange

information. Therefore, Tufekci believes social media was important for keeping Tunisians connected and informed about events, as well as offering them the opportunity to make their own comments as citizen journalists (Carlson, 2011).

On the other hand, Morozov (2011) dismissed the role of social media during the Tunisian uprising, by suggesting the revolution would have taken place even if social media had not existed. Other factors, such as authoritarianism, corruption, poverty, and the lack of human rights may have caused it to happen anyway. Interestingly, in response to this argument, Tufekci (as reported by Carlson, 2011) (despite his belief that social media had an influential role during the uprising) agrees with Morozov (2011), i.e. that the Tunisian uprising would probably have occurred regardless of social media. However, Tufekci also implies that social media did have a role to play in generating the Tunisian uprising, and he does this by making a comparison with the influential role of the printed press during the French Revolution (Carlson, 2011). These comments by Tufekci (reported by Carlson, 2011) could be regarded as indirect support for the ideas of Habermas (1984; 1991) and Shirky (2011), who claimed the printed press was a new technology that acted as a public sphere and transmitter of revolutionary ideas. Yet, people were still required to take physical action. As Tufekci explains:

‘Surely, the invention of the press is a strong antecedent of that (French) revolution. But also surely, that revolution was made by people through political action... you cannot really imagine a French Revolution, of the kind that happened, without the printing press’ (Carlson, 2011, p.1).

Furthermore, Tufekci predicts that social media will continue to be an important tool for political activists, especially during revolutions and elections.

‘And I think this is more and more what we will see; people will be using social media tools as an integral part of politics during those times that politics takes to the front-stage like uprisings and elections’ (Carlson, 2011, p.1).

He also argues that social media, unlike the isolating traditional media of TV, newspapers, and radio, strengthens civic society by encouraging people to become more involved in their local community and to exchange thoughts and ideas. These ideas are very similar to the arguments made by Bowman and Vela (2011). However Tufekci takes the claims a stage further by stating that the development of this communal strength is essential if political activism is to be successful. Importantly, Tufekci also makes the case that it was social media which enabled exiled opposition activists and expatriates living abroad to become important participants in the Tunisian uprising. This is because social media provided them with an outlet to spread information to other parts of the world and to gather international support (Carlson, 2011).

During a question and answer session, Weddady (NW) argues that Twitter users were engaged in huge information warfare, claiming there were six tweets related to the Tunisian uprising every second. He further believes that Twitter users were the most important people for informing the outside world about the revolution. However, although such enthusiasm for the role of Twitter users may be exaggerated, an interesting discussion arises as to why the uprising succeeded in Tunisia in 2011 but failed in Iran in 2009 (Carlson, 2011). In reply, the reason proffered by JY was that a strong online movement of Tunisian activists already existed prior to 2011, and so this large number of connected people was able to

spread information quickly and widely as soon as the protests broke out. JY claims that such an extensive network of connected Iranian activists did not exist in 2009, and so the spread of information was relatively disjointed and slow. Yet NW, who is a Tunisian, argued that the Tunisian activists learnt from the events in Iran, and so when their revolution started they were able to get information out onto the Internet both quickly and effectively (Carlson, 2011).

JY added:

‘One thing that I think is really fascinating, and different from the case in Iran, is that the information that was being put on Twitter and Facebook was often used by Al-Jazeera in their reporting’ (Carlson, 2011, p.1).

This suggests that mainstream Arab media, especially a satellite TV network such as Al Jazeera, can act as critical support for an uprising. Indeed, it was previously mentioned by Ben Gharbia (a leading Tunisian activist) that Al Jazeera played a crucial role in the success of his country’s revolution, by broadcasting Facebook images of Mohammed Bouazizi burning. Gharbia claimed this support by Al Jazeera meant that news of the uprising spread further and faster, thereby generating wider support (reported by Ghannam, 2011).

On the other hand, Tufekci (ZT) uses the Iranian uprising to argue that social media will not guarantee the success of every revolution. He says social media is not a magical tool, but rather just one of a number of variables which could determine the outcome of popular uprisings (Carlson, 2011). Although Tufekci does not identify these other variables, it would be reasonable to assume these might include the monitoring and censorship of social media activists by the regime as well as the level of brutality and violence that the regime inflicts on them. Unlike the vast majority of

uprisings that broke out across the Arab world in 2011, Tunisia and Egypt were different because the military in these two countries began to show empathy with the activists and many soldiers refused to slaughter the people protesting in the streets. Perhaps this is an important reason why the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt were driven from power without foreign intervention, whereas the dictators who still thrive in other Arab countries are in place because of the support of their military.

In addition, although it may be conceded that social media may not be useful for in-depth political debates, ZT says it is especially useful for quick instructions and emergencies. In particular, ZT says the short messaging of Twitter on mobile phones helped the activists with logistics, informing others of sniper positions, organising demonstrations, and calling people to donate blood at hospitals. This is in addition to social media spreading information on the uprising via citizen journalism, texts, photos and videos (Carlson, 2011). Rim Nour, a young Tunisian who participated in the country's street protests, is another who believes the revolution was primarily driven by the people because of the conditions of their lives, citing corruption and high unemployment as examples (Howard, 2011). However, Nour also says social media played an important role during Tunisia's uprising with Twitter being especially important during December, 2010. In particular, Nour says that Slim Amamou (who was later appointed Minister of Youth before resigning in protest at continued government corruption) was an exceptional inspiration to others, using the alias @slim404. However, Nour said that Facebook complemented Twitter by becoming the opposition's main tool after December 2010 for organising protests and sharing videos (Howard, 2011).

Nour also believes the Tunisian uprising would have happened regardless of social media, yet she concedes that social media speeded up the process and claims that there were four important ways in which social media helped speed up the Tunisian uprising:

(1) Grassroots mobilization. This is said to have occurred because some of the protests which took place were organised on Facebook. Therefore, social media was a form of ‘community organizing platform’.

(2) Increased civil society and active citizenship. Nour said this included keeping each other informed of local activities such as organising bread lines, the cleaning of streets, and the protection of shops.

(3) Counter-action of propaganda. Nour said social media helped activists to challenge the propaganda and false rumours coming out of the Ben Ali regime.

(4) Help with analysis of government statements. Whenever the government made statements on TV, Nour said that social media provided the people with an alternative forum for analysing these pro-regime comments from state media (Howard, 2011).

4.6 EGYPTIAN UPRISING – THE EVENTS

In March 2008, two young Egyptian activists named Ahmed Maher and Israa Abdel-Fatteh created the ‘April 6 Youth’ Facebook Page. Having been inspired by the fact that the national soccer team of Egypt had accumulated 45,000 ‘fans,’ the two wanted to see if they could form a political movement on the network. Through the use of emails and messaging going viral (online marketing), they promoted support for an industrial strike that had been planned. Within 3 weeks, some 70,000 members

had been attracted to the page, and the strike turned into a major demonstration of anti-government protest (Joseph, 2011). Although this strike had been a great success for April 6 Youth, the group had now come to the attention of the authorities and were being monitored. However, members of April 6 Youth found they could still use the Facebook page to share organisational ideas and tactics. They even had online connections with the non-violent Otpor movement, a Serbian group whose demonstrations had contributed to removing Slobodan Milosevic from power in 2000. Yet, the monitoring by the Egyptian authorities meant April 6 Youth were unable to inspire another major protest. Their attempts were always thwarted by the police, as in the case of the planned beach protest in Alexandria (Joseph, 2011). Therefore, since April 6 Youth was unable to generate much public support online, they went underground and continued their activities in secret (Nixon, 2012).

It is interesting to note, however, that young Egyptians had been using social media (for online activism, discussing, and organising) a few years prior to the uprising of 2011. These online activists constituted a small, but influential group of Egyptian youths who tended to be highly educated, and mostly came from middle class families living in urban areas (Khamis et al, 2012). At the same time, it is well-known that the youth are the fastest growing section of Arab countries. Therefore, with 33% of Egypt's youth being unemployed, it is reasonable to assume that the country was ripe for a people's uprising (Niekerk, Pillay & Maharaj, 2011). However, due to the difficulties that the Egyptian people were going through at the time at the hands of the dictatorship, lack of human rights, corruption, and economic distress, other opposition movements also existed. These included the Muslim Brotherhood, Ayman Nour's political group (known as An Nur or Hizb el Ghad) and the Kefaya ('enough') movement (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

Of these opposition movements, the Muslim Brotherhood was by far the largest and most well organised. The group had been operating in Egypt for about a hundred years, and Muslim Brotherhood leaders were regularly rounded up by the authorities and imprisoned for periods of time. Yet the group had offices right across the country, and were embedded into the very fabric of society through their charity work, voluntary construction/maintenance of poor residential areas, and their *Dawah* (Islamic preaching). However, the Muslim Brotherhood was very slow to adopt the modern tools of social media, preferring the direct approach in the form of community work, which they had always employed (Khamis et al, 2012). In addition, similar to April 6 Youth, the Muslim Brotherhood and the other opposition movements were unable to mobilise demonstrations on a large scale. If protests actually went ahead, they consisted of only a few hundred people, and so it was always easy for the police to break these protests up (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). However, the success of the Tunisian Uprising (in removing Ben Ali from power) was to have a dramatic effect on Egypt's opposition movement. Using the Tunisian Uprising as momentum, April 6 Youth joined up with other groups of social media activists in Egypt. Just as the Twitter hashtags #jan14 and #sidibouziid were used for the Tunisian uprising, so the hashtag #jan25 began trending on Twitter for the Egyptian uprising. Citizens were asked to join protest demonstrations on Egypt's annual Police Day of January 25th 2011 (Joseph, 2011).

While it is axiomatic that the Tunisian uprising started spontaneously following the death of Bouazizzi, the Egyptian uprising was actually pre-planned. The alliance of social media activists, known as the National Coalition for Change, had deliberately chosen to hold a demonstration on Police Day because Mubarak was due to give a

speech. So it was hoped this occasion would bring large crowds of protesters into Cairo's Tahir Square (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

'The use of new technologies this time helped to spread the word out about this planned protest, to ensure a popular base of support for it and, thus, to assure those organizing the January 25 protest that there will be enough numbers of people supporting them' (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011, p.8).

In addition to Twitter, the activists also publicised the proposed demonstration via Facebook. This was then picked up by the world's media, and so this provided even more momentum to the movement. In particular, Wael Ghonim (an executive with Google) asked "We Are All Khalid Said" Facebook members to join the demonstrations on January 25th. Khalid Said had been a young Egyptian who had uploaded a video onto YouTube that revealed the truth about police corruption. In response, a group of police officers beat him to death, but images of his deformed face appeared on Ghonim's "We Are All Khalid Said" Facebook Page. These pictures spread across social media, and Khalid Said became a symbol of the Egyptian uprising, provoking outrage among the general population and persuading more people to join the protests.

Gerbaudo (2015) suggests that the photos of Khalid Said may be defined as 'memetic signifiers' because of their widespread use by Egyptian street protesters. This stems from the following two points made by Gerbaudo (2015, page 916) regarding these photos: '(a) they are marked by a vagueness and inclusivity that distinguishes them from traditional protest symbols and (b) lend themselves to be used as memes for viral diffusion on social networks'. The generality of this type of icon allows a significant gathering of individuals to orientate themselves around it, in terms of both

online and offline protesting. The online activism which gathered around the images of Khalid Said went viral online through social media thereby reaching huge numbers of individuals, and the offline street demonstrators used it as a successful rallying call against the Mubarak regime. This is because the sign depicting Khalid Said may be regarded as a signifier that has the signified meaning of having the courage to stand up against state oppression in order to achieve freedom and justice.

On the other hand, although Gerbaudo (2015) believes that the photos of Khalid Said were powerful in the short term for collective identification, he acknowledges they can be volatile and easily discarded in the longer term. This suggests that the adoption of these types of image by activists is unlikely to form a durable foundation for such activism. Furthermore, Gerbaudo and Treré (2015, p. 869) also claim that the collective identification derived from this communication '[goes] against visions of social media as irremediably individualistic.' In other words, social media may be regarded as encouraging sentiments of feeling part of a group rather than of being an individual protester.

Large numbers of ordinary citizens were now prepared to revolt against the injustice of the Emergency Law, autocracy, corruption, and the lack of human rights. Within three days of Ghonim posting his request, over 50,000 people responded, promising to attend. Furthermore, Ghonim requested his Facebook followers to inform as many people as possible of the planned action on January 25th (Khamis et al, 2012). The social media activists were effective at using videos and images to provoke anger, horror, and disgust among citizens. It was a strategy that encouraged more people to protest, and so this may show that online activism can be translated into offline activism. If this is the case, then it is an argument against Gladwell's claim that

social media is a weak tie. By the same token, this strategy by the activists could be viewed as supporting Shirky's notion that social media is excellent for mobilisation.

On January 25th, tens of thousands of people came out to protest on Police Day. In fact, the size of the uprising (as well as the protesters' media sophistication) took the regime by such surprise that their initial responses were confused and disorganised. Sometimes the regime broadcast media messages declaring everything was fine, yet on other occasions they reported there was a problem with thugs, criminals and extremists (Petersen, 2011). Following the successful protest on Police Day, social media activists began organising the Day of Rage protest for January 28th. Twitter hashtags #jan 28 and #days of rage went into wide circulation. Thus, in an attempt to disrupt all communications by social media, Mubarak shut down the entire Egyptian Internet on 27th January. However, despite the Internet blackout lasting for 5 days, there were 17 days of non-stop protests that started on the day of the shutdown and continued after its restoration (Joseph, 2011). In addition, on the 'Day of Rage', the regime stopped the use of mobile phones and some landlines. There were also restrictions placed on satellite TV, especially Al Jazeera, and some journalists were beaten and arrested. All of these actions brought complaints from the United Nations (UN), the European Commission (EU) and the United States of America (US). Nonetheless, the regime took control of mobile phone networks, and forced mobile service providers to send several text messages to the Egyptian population. These messages advised the people to stay at home and told them to stop the demonstrations. Even after the regime restored the text messaging services, they still continued to send mass text messages to the general population (Dunn, 2011).

Ironically, the biggest impact caused by the Internet blackout was not felt by the opposition movement, but by Egypt's businesses, banks, and stock exchange. They lost hundreds of millions of dollars during the shutdown because they could not operate. On the other hand, the opposition movement and the demonstrations in Tahir Square actually grew larger and more intense during this period. Denied Internet access, increasing numbers of people went outside to see what was happening and then joined the protests themselves. They increased the size of the opposition as they visited friends' houses, gathered in the Mosque, and went onto the streets (Petersen, 2011). This suggests support for the Cute Cat Theory, i.e. that when ordinary peoples' Internet trivia is shutdown they are likely to become transformed into protesters. In addition, shutting down the Internet did not stop the activists' communications. For example, when the regime blocked Twitter, the activists used special software to circumvent this problem. Also, the activists used landline phones to call their friends abroad and told them to 'tweet' the activists' messages for them. Furthermore, it has also been claimed that regimes face the 'Dictator's Dilemma' if an uprising breaks out in their country. If they decide to crack down heavily on the protests, the regime will face the problem of intense international pressure and possible sanctions (Dunn, 2011).

With regard to the Internet blackout, it seems that the opposition movement and the demonstrations in Tahir Square actually grew larger and more intense during this period. Gerbaudo (2013) explains that the Mubarak regime intended that the Internet blackout should disrupt the activists' ability to communicate, plan, organise and co-ordinate their activities. However, the blackout actually witnessed a simultaneous increase in the scale and the number of mass street protests in the country. Gerbaudo (2013, p. 25) suggests this was due to two main reasons. First, the 'kill switch'

shattered the consensus in favour of the regime and the passivity of middle-class youth. Second, by excluding the possibility of a virtual distant connection with the protest, it forced many sympathizers to turn into supporters of the movement by physically joining the occupation in Tahrir Square.

In other words, having been denied Internet access, increasing numbers of people ventured outside to see what was happening and then joined the protests themselves. They increased the size of the opposition as they visited friends' houses, gathered in the Mosque, and went onto the streets. Castells also mentions the enormous assistance that activists received during this time.

‘The most important obstacle governments face when trying to shut off the Internet comes from the vigilance of the global Internet community, which includes hackers, techies, companies, defenders of civil liberties, activist networks such as Anonymous and people from around the world for whom the Internet has become a fundamental right and a way of life. This community came to the rescue of Egypt as it did with Tunisia in 2010’ (Castells, 2012, p. 62).

With the added weight of international complaints (UN, EU, and USA) and with the huge financial losses to businesses, Mubarak was compelled to restore the Internet after five days of blackout. However, the regime continued its campaign against the opposition movement. Activists and political figures had their blogs and social media websites hacked, including attacks by a pro-regime group calling itself the Egyptian Knights. In addition, political parties and other organizations had their websites hacked and defaced, including the Muslim Brotherhood and An Nur (Khamis et al,

2012). However, the Egyptian people were now using the Internet and social media in increasingly large numbers. As Petersen explains:

‘Internet use exploded in Egypt during the uprising as traditional users discovered its political power, and new users were attracted by the uses to which social media sites were being put. Facebook alone garnered an extra one million users after Internet service was restored on February 2 (up from 4.2 million people in January to 5.3 million in February). The state-owned Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported that during the uprising Egypt had the largest Facebook community in the Middle East’ (Petersen, 2011, p. 6).

In desperation, the Egyptian regime continued using state media, especially TV, to blame the violence on armed gangs and extremists. Yet, in reality, it was the security officers who were beating and killing citizens. By then, the regime was no longer trying to fool the people by broadcasting peaceful images of the river Nile. Rather, in an attempt to counter the activists’ videos of huge rallies, the regime broadcast images of pro-Mubarak demonstrations. Also, although foreign journalists were allowed into Egypt to report the news, they were sometimes harassed and arrested (Khamis et al, 2012).

In response, activists uploaded videos and images of protesters defacing or destroying the propagandist symbols of the Mubarak regime. Also, in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, shoes were thrown at live pictures of Mubarak that had been projected onto the walls of large buildings. This was during his infamous speech on February 10, 2011 when he refused to leave office. Sarcastic comments about Mubarak that had been posted on social media were also written onto many of the protesters’ banners.

Again, this suggests a link between online and offline activism (Khamis et al, 2012). Certain writers have claimed that social media were important tools for the Egyptian activists in a number of ways. Such writers mention that social media helped the activists to plan and organise the protests, to spread information, videos, and images, and to generate support for the uprising across the wider population. In addition, social media is said to have assisted in the exchange of ideas across borders. For instance, the message “Advice to the youth of Egypt: Put vinegar or onion under your scarf for tear gas” was posted on Facebook by Tunisian activists. Also, ideas on how to counter Internet monitoring, resist rubber bullets, and build barricades were passed from the Tunisian activists to the Egyptian activists (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

Meanwhile, social media enabled citizen journalism to play a vital role in the Egyptian uprising. The activists made known their story to the rest of the world, thereby challenging the regime’s propaganda. As the rallies in Tahir Square grew huge in size and continued on a daily basis, social media and citizen journalism showed how the regime was using lethal violence against peaceful protesters. This information was then used by the international media (especially Al Jazeera, CNN and the BBC) and this shaped public opinion outside Egypt. Strong support for the uprising developed in the USA, EU and the Arab world, and it was this domestic pressure that forced President Obama to ask his ally Mubarak to resign (Petersen, 2011). The uprising was also assisted by large numbers of Egyptian soldiers for, rather than shoot at protesters, they actually showed friendship and compassion towards them. Therefore, on February 11th 2011, Mubarak was forced to resign, and this meant that the Egyptian uprising was settled with relatively little pressure

applied to the regime by other countries. In addition, the violence was very limited and it did not spread across the country (Khamis et al, 2012).

4.7 COMMENTS ON THE EGYPTIAN UPRISING

The killing of Khalid Said has often been described as the event that triggered the Egyptian uprising. This is because the subsequent Facebook page attracted such huge attention, with nearly one million people visiting the site in just a few hours. Twitter was then important for helping the activists to organise the demonstrations and communicate with each other (Sadek, 2011). Thus, it has been claimed that social media generated social and political change in three important ways. Firstly, social media accelerated the process of political change through citizen journalism. Secondly, it activated civil society and civic engagement by allowing open political discussions. Thirdly, it was the catalyst that enabled mass street protests (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Khamis et al, 2012). In particular, civic engagement has been claimed to be an important stage in the march towards the creation of a democratic society. Thus, social media is said to have fulfilled this requirement by providing a public sphere where citizens can express their opinions, and where government officials can be held accountable (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

It has also been explained that the Egyptian uprising was reported through a combination of social and traditional media. Al Jazeera was particularly effective in this regard, integrating both media so that their TV coverage included many citizen journalists on the ground (Joseph, 2011). Ultimately, however, many writers have emphasized the people's determination to implement change, and it was this display of courage that is said to have driven the Egyptian uprising. Therefore, such writers do not claim that social media solely generated social and political change, but they

do believe it assisted and accelerated that process. In particular, it is said that the significance of social media lies in the fact that it does more than just inform. It leads to physical action by filling the gap between online activism and offline activism. In such circumstances, citizens who are hesitant or uncertain are given the encouragement that they need to join the protests (Sadek, 2011).

On the other hand, it is interesting how quickly the uprising spread from Tunisia to Egypt. In fact, this would imply a shared sense of solidarity between the people of different Arab countries. The relative openness of satellite TV and new media (as compared to the heavily censored traditional media) had helped to transform the people. Arab citizens were now developing a new identity that desired real societal change. As Elseewi states:

‘Transnational television and Internet production thus represent and embody a change in how the nation is narrated, and this shift in the shared narrative represents a transformation in how its people imagine themselves in relation to both one another and the rest of the world. Instead of being within the control of the Egyptian state, contemporary mediated articulations of the nation and other forms of once localized cultural identity have become transnational—which helps to explain why the uprisings have spread so quickly’ (Elseewi, 2011, p.6).

Social media also played a role in revealing the authorities’ violence, corruption, and abuses of human rights. However, the debate still continues as to how much pressure this actually imposes on a regime. For instance, optimists have claimed that social media and citizen journalism is now influencing mainstream Arab media, by making it more open and accountable (Khamis et al, 2012). Yet, state monitoring and

censorship are factors that must also still be taken into account, and these will be considered later in this research.

Interestingly, it has been explained that each of the social media tools was best suited for a different role during the uprising. For instance, it is claimed that Facebook was most suitable for finding other people with similar political beliefs, and was also an effective means for organising demonstrations. On the other hand, Twitter was especially useful for enabling the protesters to coordinate and communicate during the demonstrations, and allowed contact with the world's media and diasporic communities (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). Social media was an easily accessible and effective communication tool. It became a public sphere that linked geographically separated individuals together, allowing them to supplement, comment on and reframe news information. Ultimately, social media was developed into a strong network by activists, and this proved to be very difficult for the regime to disrupt.

Dunn (2011) analysed the Egyptian regime's media strategy during the uprising. It was a strategy, as discussed earlier, that ultimately failed. However, it is interesting to note how Dunn broke the regime's strategy down into three stages. Each stage became progressively more severe than the previous one, as the regime struggled to control the flow of information. She explains it *viz*:

'The process of the Egyptian government's aggressive assault on media requires careful consideration. It first attacked content (information traveling through media and grounded, non-aggregated social networks), followed by general platforms (Facebook and Twitter), and then communication infrastructure (mobile telephone and Internet services)' (Dunn, 2011, p. 16).

Hofheinz further claims that social media has been instrumental in changing people's attitude in Egypt. He says that Wael Ghonim (Google's Middle East marketing director who helped set up the Facebook group "We are all Khalid Said") can be regarded as representing a new type of activist. Like many other online activists, he is a 30 year-old, who has been born, raised, and lived under the Mubarak regime for his entire life. These activists have always been ruled by a group of old men who have denied them basic human rights. These old leaders insisted their authority was the only way to maintain order, and they claimed there would be social chaos without their being in absolute charge. The Mubarak regime then backed up his rule with a brutal state apparatus of beatings and imprisonment (Hofheinz, 2011).

Yet the online activists were no longer willing to accept this authoritarianism. They were now prepared to stand up and fight for the right of self-determination. In this sense, the "We are all Khalid Said" campaign captured this new mood of the young activists.

'And this is the crucial point. It is the attitude that changes, the attitude of individual users toward authority, a disregard for the long chain of authority, for established hierarchies that used to structure decision making' (Hofheinz, 2011, p.9).

Nonetheless, although the determination of the Egyptian people played a role in driving the uprising, it seems this process of change was assisted and accelerated by social media. The final outcome in Egypt still remains unknown, yet it is certain that the struggle for political transformation has started and it is not likely to stop. Similarly, the cyber-wars and the utilisation of social media will continue to evolve in unpredictable ways. In essence, it is the myriad of complex factors and their

interactions that will finally determine how and when political transformation takes place.

4.8 DISCUSSION OF EGYPTIAN UPRISING

It was shown that Facebook penetration in Egypt was 5.49% (4.6 million people) in December 2010 (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Also the poverty headcount was 22.0% (as at 2008) and GNI per capita was \$2,600 in 2011 (World Bank, 2012). Therefore, on the eve of the Egyptian uprising, Egypt had the third highest Facebook penetration percentage from among eight Arab countries in Africa (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Yet this relatively large number of Facebook users was combined with severe poverty, high unemployment, and authoritarianism. In other words, it could be argued that the underlying causes for a revolution existed, and that social media simply speeded up this process. By April 2011 (about 4 months after the start of the Arab uprising) Facebook penetration had increased from 5.49% to 7.66% within Egypt (Dubai School of Government 2, 2011). However, by June 2012, Egyptian Facebook penetration had leaped dramatically to an incredible 13.1% (Dubai School of Government 3, 2011). In just six months, the number of Egyptian Facebook users had more than doubled, and this rapid increase corresponds exactly with the first six months of the Egyptian uprising. This suggests there has been a positive relationship between social media use and the generation of social/political change in the country.

A survey carried out by the Dubai School of Government (2011) also identified strong evidence of Facebook being used by Egyptian activists and protesters. For example, the following results are percentages of Facebook users in Egypt:

- Organizing actions and managing activists (29.55%)
- Disseminating information around the world about the civil movement (24.05%)
- Raising awareness inside the country of the movement (30.93%)
- Entertainment or other (15.46%) (Dubai School of Government 2, 2011)

With regard to Twitter penetration in Egypt, this has been far lower than Facebook penetration. The average (from January 2011 to March 2011) was just 0.15% in Egypt (Dubai School of Government 2, 2011). Nonetheless, despite this small percentage, Lotan et al (2011) analysed the Twitter flows of very similar tweets that were sent between activists, bloggers, journalists, the mainstream media and other participants. From this analysis, the report found that Twitter plays a very important role in increasing and spreading useful information across the world. In addition, Lotan et al (2011) analysed the period January 24th-29th, 2011, for the Egyptian demonstrations, and the data revealed large increases in related tweets before major demonstrations. Therefore, this suggests a positive role for social media with regard to raising awareness of forthcoming protests and planning protesters' activities.

Research by the Dubai School of Government 2 (2011) produced very similar results to those of Lotan et al (2011). They published their findings in May 2011, including the following graph, which shows Twitter activity during the first weeks of the Egyptian uprising.

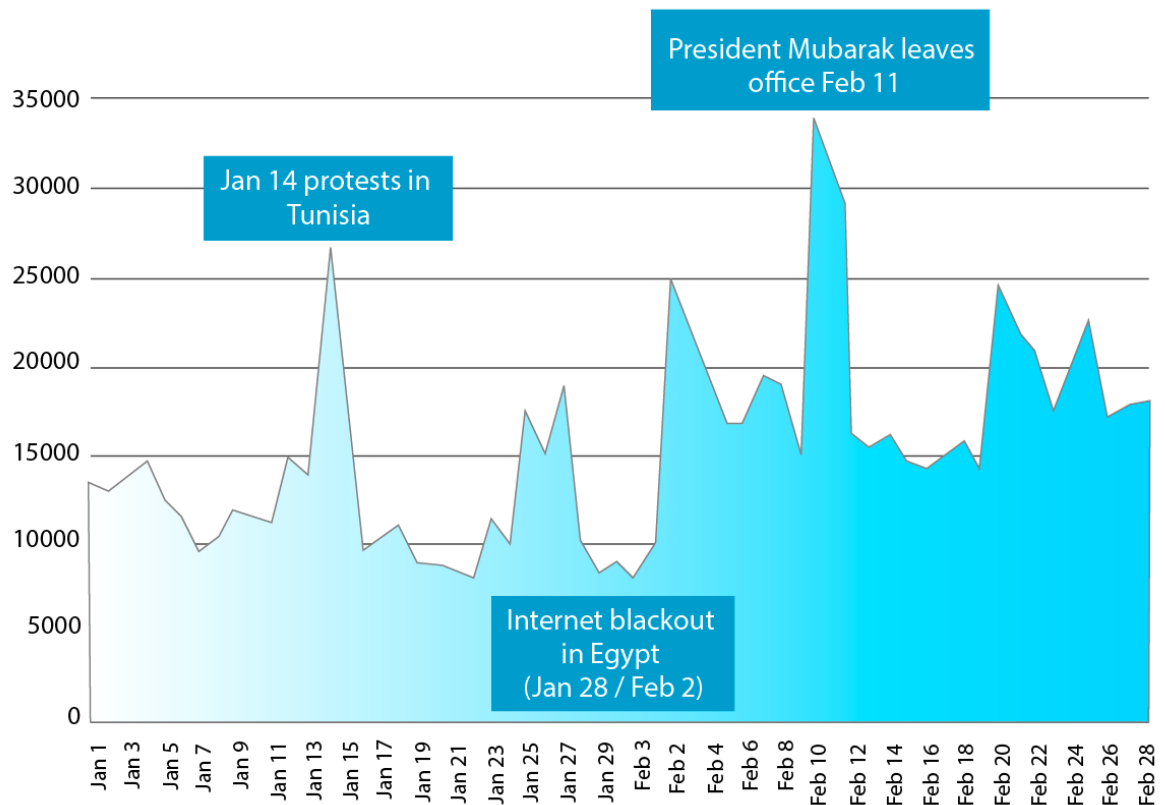


Figure 4: Volume of daily tweets in Egypt (Jan – Feb, 2011)

Source: (Dubai School of Government 2, 2011)

Between January and March 2011, the percentage of Twitter users in Egypt was only 0.15% of the population. Therefore, this percentage is even smaller than that of Tunisia. However, this graph shows that Twitter use by Egyptians also increased at the time of demonstrations and important events. For example, there was a spike in Twitter use by Egyptians on 14th January. As mentioned previously, this was the day of mass protests in Tunisia and the same day that Ben Ali fled the country. This suggests that Arabs were very interested in the uprisings in other Arab countries.

There was also a sharp increase in Twitter use between 23rd and 25th January. This was the time when the Egyptian activists were organising and planning the Egyptian

uprising. January 25th was the ‘Day of Rage,’ and it was the largest demonstration ever to be held in Egypt. Another large increase in Twitter use by Egyptians was between 2nd and 4th of February. Again, this was a period when the activists were planning another major demonstration. February 4th was the ‘Day of Departure’ when huge crowds of people called for Mubarak to leave office. A week later on 11th February Mubarak resigned, and this was also the day that the Egyptians’ use of Twitter reached its highest peak. Overall, therefore, this again suggests a close link between online and offline activism.

‘Considering the popularity of the hashtags #egypt, #jan25....along with surges on the dates of major protests, it appears that political issues dominated Twitter use in the region. These results indicate that social media fulfilled the functions in Shirky’s two steps by providing information and facilitating conversation about political matters’ (Joseph, 2011, p .166).

Similarly, other writers have produced details of how they say social media enabled the movement of people from online to offline activism. They have also demonstrated the importance of ‘cyberactivism’ and revealed that social media activists were few but very influential. They have shown how activists foiled the regime’s censorship and monitoring initiatives, how the Facebook ‘We are all Khalid’ campaign in Egypt (inspired by the activist Khalid Said, who was murdered by the regime) was important in generating support for the uprising, and, finally, how social media was a valuable tool in countering the regime’s lies and propaganda (Khamis et al, 2012). Furthermore, it has been stated that the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia would not have happened so rapidly without the use of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. They broadcast news across the country and to the outside world, and

they were the tools used for the planning and management of the uprisings. However, it should be recognised that social media can be used either positively or negatively (Delicastelli, 2011).

From another perspective, social media sceptics may argue that a regime can easily monitor and censor social media, that it provides plenty of personal information for the regime, it is easily crushed under brutality, and that it can also be used to push a pro-regime message. Ultimately, social media organisations are motivated by profit, not social reform so they will usually accede to instructions from a country's government to reveal personal information or censor particular individuals. Moreover, whilst social media may be useful in helping to start an uprising, the Egyptian activists' defeats in a number of post-Mubarak elections show that it is not good for complex, political debating (Joseph, 2011). Joseph also points to the fact that Egypt's traditional, well-organised political groups (which had a clear hierarchy and one overall leader) were the groups that took control of the country's protests and ultimately gained power through the elections. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood and the An Nur Party have the majority of seats in the new Parliament and, unlike the young social media activists who are calling for freedom and democracy, these are religiously conservative parties that did not originally have a strong social media campaign (Joseph, 2011).

Gladwell's belief that successful social movements require organized hierarchies (rather than loose networks) is worth exploring. For example, Slim Amamou was an important activist and blogger who played a central role in organising the Tunisian protests. However, he was one of many such organisers, and neither he nor any other activists became the movement's overall leader. Slim Amamou was arrested on

January 6th, but then he was released after Ben Ali fled the country. He then went on to become the Minister for Sport and Youth in the post Ben Ali government. Yet he is the only social media activist who achieved a position of political power, and he resigned a few months later due to concerns over cronyism. Similarly, in Egypt, Ahmed Maher is the founder of the April 6 Youth movement, and Wael Ghonim is a Google executive who set up the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said.” This Facebook page helped to rally support for the Egyptian uprising after the activist Khaled Said was beaten to death by security forces. However, although Maher and Ghonim may have helped the Egyptian uprising to get started, neither of them was a leader of the mass demonstrations that followed. Instead, it was the highly-organized and traditional anti-government bodies (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) or famous opposition figures (such as Mohammed El-Baradei) who took leading roles in the protests, even though they joined the protests much later than the social media activists. Furthermore, most interestingly, these groups and individuals had based their activities ‘on the ground’ and in the community, not via social media.

The empirical evidence could offer support for Gladwell’s idea that social media activists do not have the hierarchies that are needed for political success. Thus, even though the more liberal youth started the revolution, they did not get political power. It was the more conservative and better-organized groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Nur, which took control of the protests and gained political power. In particular, the social media activists were defeated in two crucial elections in the immediate post-Mubarak era. There are several reasons why this happened. Firstly, during the referendum regarding constitutional change, the activists called for a totally new constitution to be drawn up. However, when the Egyptian public went to the ballot boxes and voted on the issue, the people rejected the activists’

arguments. Instead, the majority of voters supported the Muslim Brotherhood by voting in favour of constitutional amendments. Similarly, in the subsequent parliamentary elections, the activists did not win a single seat. The explanation for this may be that a sophisticated level of organization is required to form political parties and then run for office.

In other words, some argue that the activists were poorly organised, had no overall leader, did not have clear beliefs or objectives, and that they lacked a coherent strategy from the very start. Therefore, they should have established a clear method for achieving their aims from the outset. Importantly, the activists should have unified when embarking on this strategy because the simple aim of removing a regime and hoping for democracy is not enough. Detailed planning and policy creation are a necessary first step. Perhaps the activists' electoral defeats are evidence that, whilst social media may be an excellent communication tool for short pieces of information, it is not suitable for lengthy and intricate political debates. Rather, social media is ideal for quick and easy conversations, which tend to be shallow, short, and easily replaced by the latest "big topic" of popularity.

4.9 SOCIAL MEDIA AND WOMEN DURING THE UPRISINGS

It has been claimed by various authors that social media is a driving force behind a number of crucial developments related to youth and women that are now taking place (Simonetti, 2011). For example, Mourtada and Salem (2012) are very positive about the societal and political transformations they perceive are occurring. They believe that the youth and women have been able to utilise social media in order to revolutionise the Arab world and to bring a new perception of women within Arab society. Furthermore, it is argued that this has been possible despite the danger of

beatings, torture, and possible death whilst being held in detention by the authorities (Mourtada and Salem, 2012). Importantly, Mourtada and Salem (2012) also argue that social media and the Arab uprisings have combined to produce a new social/political environment, and that women are playing a crucial role in this revolutionary process.

When we examine Arab countries separately from one another, it can be seen that Tunisia’s Facebook users are 59% male and 41% female whilst Egypt’s Facebook users are 63% male and 37%female. Therefore, although Tunisia’s 41% female Facebook users is a figure still much lower than the 50% global average, nonetheless it is also one of the highest percentages in the Arab world. In fact, as shown in the table below, Tunisia has the fourth highest percentage of female users from among twenty Arab countries, and even Egypt is relatively high in seventh place (Dubai School of Government 4, 2011).

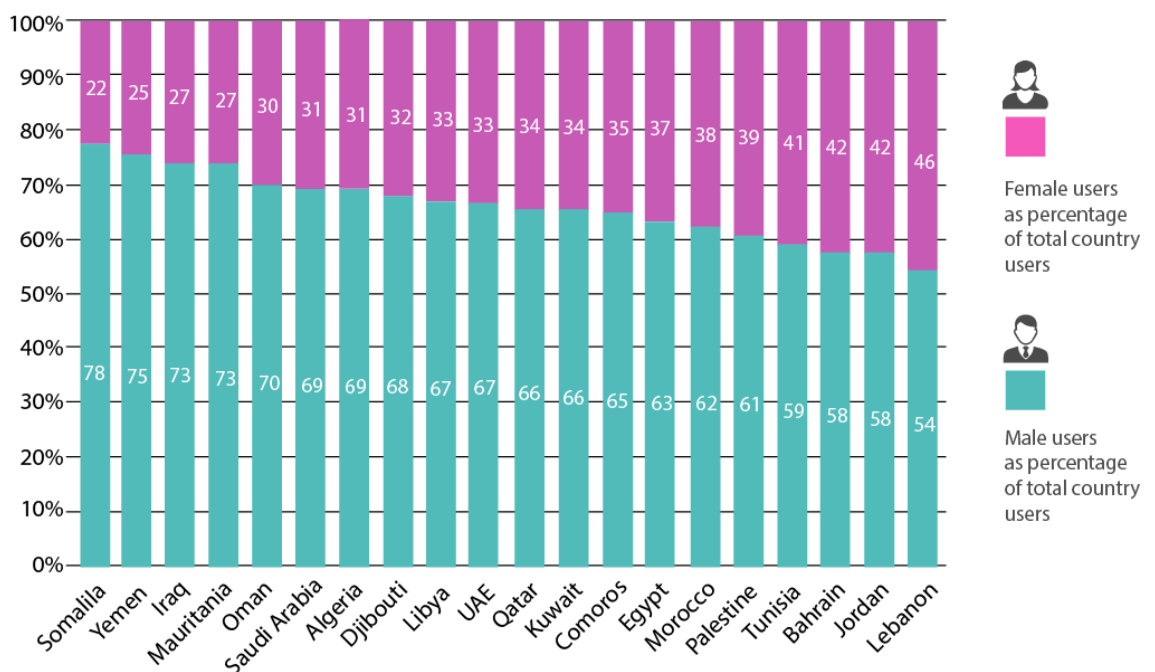


Figure 5: Gender breakdown of Facebook users in Arab countries (Oct 2011)

(Dubai School of Government 4, 2011)

The respondents were also asked about their use of social media during the uprising in their country, and it was found that 39% of Arab men used it primarily to raise awareness of the causes of the revolution. On the other hand, however, only 27% of Arab women used social media primarily to raise awareness of the causes of the revolution in their country. Therefore, although women may be increasing their political activity on social media, these figures suggest they are still far less active than men. Furthermore, this appears to be supported by the answers that respondents provided to additional questions. For instance, whilst 30% of men said they mostly used social media to spread information around the world about the revolutions and related events, only 25% of women said they used social media primarily for this purpose (Dubai School of Government 4, 2011).

Similarly, 16% of men and 22% of women said their main use of social media during the uprising was for entertainment (such as games) and social use (connecting with friends). Therefore, during the uprisings, the overall implication is that men were far more active than women in using social media to raise awareness of the causes of the uprising and to spread information regarding it. By contrast, a far higher percentage of women used social media during the uprising for fun and socialising. Interestingly, however, 3% of men and 9% of women said their main use of social media during the uprising was to organise action and manage other activists. So, whilst men were more active than women in raising awareness and spreading information, it appears that women were far more active than men in organising and managing the activities. *'Arab women were not merely cyber activists, but were documented as active participants on the ground, taking part in, organizing, and even leading protests'* (Dubai School of Government 4, 2011, p.2). For information purposes, all of this research data is shown in the graph below.

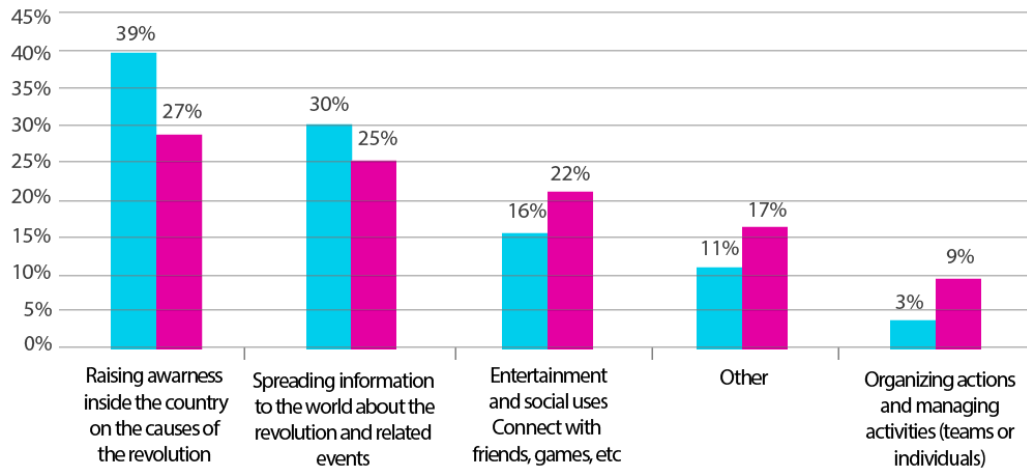


Figure 6: Primary use of social media during the uprisings

(Source: Dubai School of Government 4, 2011)

Significantly, the report also showed that most respondents were optimistic about social media’s potential for generating women’s empowerment. With the Western perception that women suffer greatly from gender inequality in the Arab world, it was found that the majority of Arab users regard social media as a potential catalyst for changing that perception in the future. ‘Most felt that social media could, in fact, enhance women’s participation in the legal, political, economic, social and civic arenas’ (Dubai School of Government 4, 2011, p.4). These results are depicted in the following bar chart.

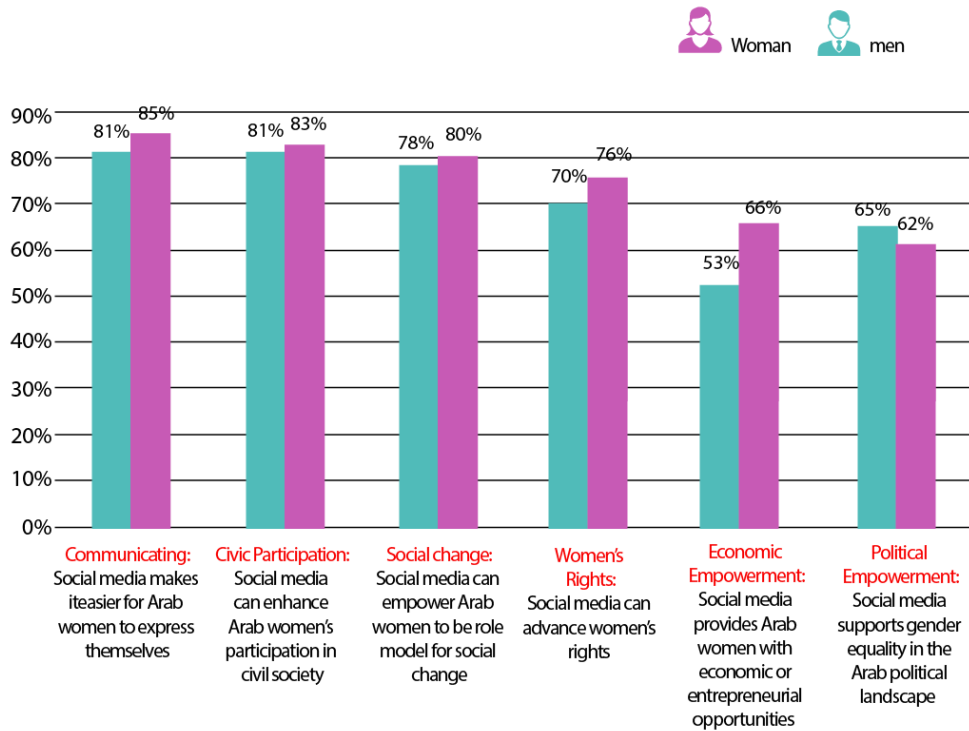


Figure 7: Survey of women and social media

(Source: Dubai School of Government 4, 2011)

4.9.1 INFLUENTIAL WOMEN OF THE UPRISINGS

A number of writers have discussed the leading role played by many Arab women during the uprisings, and some of these writers have also shown how certain women became very important during this period. Therefore, this again suggests that the uprisings represented a unique opportunity for women to become more influential in society, and that social media was a tool which accelerated this process (Arshad, 2013). Facebook and Twitter enabled women, such as Asma Mahfouz in Egypt, to become prominent social media activists during the uprisings. In fact even more women were now able to climb the ladder of political success and it has been

suggested that the increased social media activism by women during the uprisings directly influenced these higher levels of political success for women (Arshad, 2013).

After the overthrow of Ben Ali, the Al Nahda party deliberately fielded a 50/50 ratio of male and female candidates on its way to winning the Tunisian elections. This led to the election of 90 Al Nahda MPs, of these 48 were men and 42 were women. The overall parliamentary total was 60 female MPs out of 217. Furthermore, nine women were appointed to head new government commissions and three women became government ministers. For example, Mehrezia Labidi became the highest ranking female politician in the Arab world because the Tunisian uprising allowed her to become the Deputy Speaker of the Tunisian National Assembly. She was installed into this position after Al Nahda won the first democratic elections that took place in the country in October 2011 (Arshad, 2013).

In Egypt, tens of thousands of women participated in social media activism during the protests in Cairo's Tahir Square and other locations around the country. Furthermore, they did this in the face of great personal risk because of the additional dangers that existed for women. There were numerous reports of the Egyptian security forces and thugs hired by the Mubarak regime who were involved in rape, sexual assaults and physical attacks on women (Amnesty, 2012). However, after the elections, several women were voted into the Egyptian parliament and two women became ministers in the new cabinet (Arshad, 2013). Therefore, although women may still be under-represented in the Egyptian government, it is suggested that the higher rate of social media activism by Egyptian women during the uprising did influence the increase in these numbers (Arshad, 2013).

In Tunisia, one of the social media activists who had an important role in distributing news on the uprising was Lina Ben Mhenn. The daughter of a leading political activist, she began her online activities in 2007, and her blogs and Facebook pages were vital in spreading news about the protests during the blackout of the mainstream media. In relation to Mohammad Bouazizi setting himself on fire, Radsch (2012, p.12) reports, '[s]he was one of the first people to write about the incident and turned her blog, Twitter, and Facebook page into a virtual newsroom'.

Similarly, Esraa Abdel Fattah was one of the leading females of the Egyptian uprising. In fact, the important part that Esraa Abdel Fattah played in launching the April 6 Movement (the influential youth movement developed through Facebook) earned her the nickname of Facebook Girl (Radsch, 2012). Another Egyptian woman, Mona Eltahawy, was living in New York when the uprising started in Egypt. However, her extensive political knowledge was combined with her fluency in both the Arabic and English languages, and this helped her to play a critical part in translating a variety of sources, drawing widespread attention to the uprising, and boosting the credibility of cyber-activists. Shima'a Helmy also bravely joined the protests in Tahir Square and offered first-hand accounts of the protests, police beatings and arrests (Radsch, 2012). It was even noted that:

'Women such as Hand Sabry, a prominent Tunisian movie star, used social media such as Facebook to challenge former President Ben Ali' (Simonetti, 2011, p. 7).

Therefore, optimists point to the 'developing' role of women and social media as important aspects of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. They claim women and social media were successfully compatible in helping to generate social and political

change in these countries (Simonetti, 2011). As an example, the case of Buthaina Kamel is often mentioned because (at the elections of 2011) she became the first woman in Egyptian history to run for president (Simonetti, 2011).

4.9.2 CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter has shown there are claims that the catalyst to the Tunisian uprising was the drastic action of Bouazizi setting himself on fire because this generated a protest of support for him which was staged by hundreds of youth in front of the same government building. Importantly, it has further been claimed that Bouazizi's cousin, Ali, recorded this demonstration and then put the video out onto Facebook. Over the next few days, spontaneous street demonstrations broke out across the country and the police responded with violence and brutality. Yet, unlike previous demonstrations (such as occurred at Ben Guerdane in 2009 and at Gafsa in 2008) the uprising of 2011 was successful. Some have claimed that Al Jazeera TV was a crucial partner in the success of the Tunisian uprising. The Arabic satellite channel is an emerging giant in global media, and it supported the uprising by broadcasting sympathetic videos, images and stories of the demonstrations. In particular, it broadcast Facebook images of the early protests outside the government building where Bouazizi had set himself on fire. Therefore, one of the objectives of this thesis is to identify whether social media was the reason why the uprising succeeded on this occasion or whether the uprising would have happened anyway because of other factors.

It was further discussed by Lotan et al (2011) that Twitter use in Tunisia from January 12th until January 19th 2011 showed important correlations between Twitter use on the one hand and the demonstrations and activities of the protesters on the

other hand. Their general conclusion was that Twitter had played a vital part in amplifying and disseminating important information. However, there may be some credibility to the theory of the Dictator's Dilemma. This is because the Ben Ali regime recognised the need to adopt this new technology in order for the country to develop economically and to participate effectively in world affairs. However, at the same time, the regime was concerned that the Internet (and especially the widespread chatting on social media) might encourage opposition to the regime and political dissent.

With regard to Egypt, it was shown that in March 2008, two young Egyptian activists named Ahmed Maher and Israa Abdel-Fatteh created the 'April 6 Youth' Facebook Page. Such social media activists have been described as a small, but influential, group of Egyptian youth who tended to be highly educated, and who mostly came from middle class families living in urban areas. Importantly, however, although the Tunisian uprising started spontaneously following the death of Bouazizzi, the Egyptian uprising was actually pre-planned. The alliance of social media activists, known as the National Coalition for Change, had deliberately chosen to hold a demonstration on Police Day because Mubarak was due to give a speech.

The activists also publicised the proposed demonstration via Facebook. This was then picked up by the world's media, and so this provided momentum for the movement. For instance, "We Are All Khalid Said" became an iconic rallying call on Facebook. Thus, an objective of this thesis's methodology was to investigate the role and significance of social media during this period, especially compared to the traditional public sphere. Furthermore, during the first months following Mubarak's resignation, a group of army Generals took control of the country. This caused the

activists to engage in cyber-activism (social media warfare) and street activism against the Generals. Violence then erupted at a football match, leading to the murder of 74 people in the stadium. This raises the concern that, even if social media can assist in the transition from dictatorship to democracy, the process of transition may not necessarily be peaceful.

Having evaluated the electoral defeat of the social media activists and secularists in both Tunisia and Egypt, it could be reasoned that social media usage has not yet expanded to the wider Egyptian society. Only a tiny percentage of the population actually saw the arguments that were posted by social media activists. Also, social media may not be suitable for explaining very detailed political opinions and policies. Besides, the revolutionary youth may simply have had opinions and beliefs that were not the same as the majority of the Egyptian people. In addition, the lack of an overall leader for the activists in both countries would suggest that Gladwell's belief that successful social movements require organized hierarchies (rather than loose networks) is worth exploring. Regarding the role of women, there are claims that both social media and the uprisings have brought about fundamental changes to the traditional perceptions of Arab women. In fact, it has been argued that Tunisian and Egyptian women were directly involved in their countries' uprisings, both as influential social media activists and as protesters in the street demonstrations. Tunisian and Egyptian women, especially the youth, turned out in numbers never seen before and they are said to have contributed significantly in helping to remove Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak from power.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS FROM THE TUNISIAN AND EGYPTIAN INTERVIEWS

5.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER FIVE

This chapter is where the research findings (as generated from the application of the methodology) are presented. As highlighted within Objective Five of the research aims and objectives (set out in the Introduction of this thesis), it should be borne in mind that the findings are embedded within the specific cultural context of Tunisia and Egypt. Furthermore, due to the extensive amount of findings, the researcher's analysis and evaluation will not be presented here but will instead, be presented in the Chapter entitled Analysis and Discussion. Also, the findings set out in this chapter will be divided into Part A for Tunisia and Part B for Egypt, where these two parts will discuss all the themes and sub-themes that were generated from the thematic analysis.

The stages of thematic analysis that were undertaken (as part of the methodology) are described in detail in Chapter Three. In brief, the researcher began to notice potential patterns of meaning, as well as issues of relevance and interest, whilst carrying out the interviews. Yet it was only after the transcripts of the entire data set had been written up that it became possible to start the formal coding process. The names of these various codes (along with their brief descriptions) had been written onto separate pieces of paper and then these pieces of paper were moved around until they became organised into numerous piles of different initial themes. Through a repeated

process of refinement (thematic mapping), a small number of main themes and their sub-themes were then distilled into a final thematic map.

5.1 PART A: FINDINGS FROM TUNISIAN INTERVIEWS

Prior to setting out the findings from the Tunisian interviews, the three Tunisian thematic maps are presented here. These maps show how the themes and sub-themes for Tunisia were gradually combined and reduced. A full listing of all the final main themes and final sub-themes that were created for Tunisia can be found in the appendix.

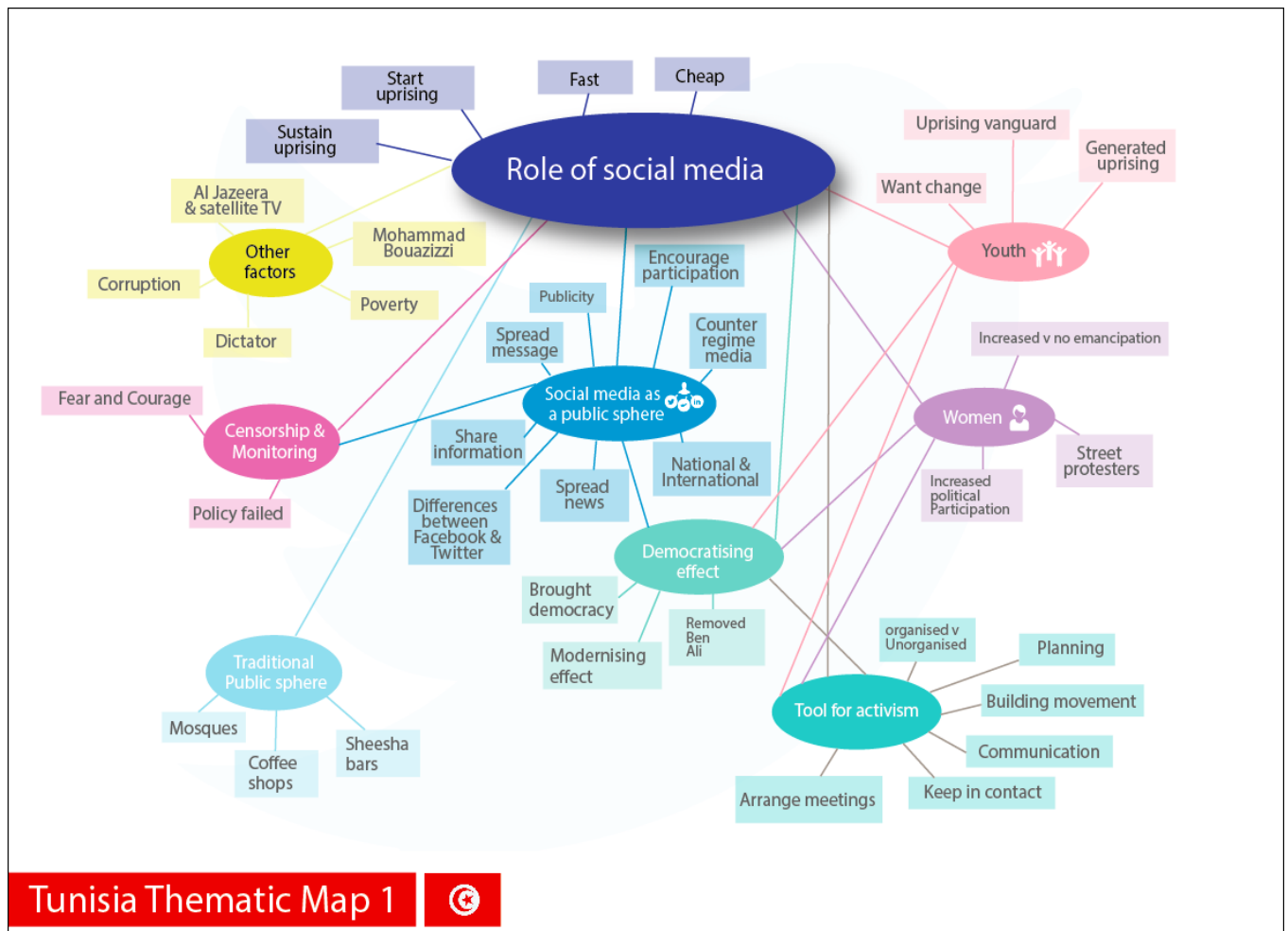


Figure 8: Tunisia Thematic Map 1

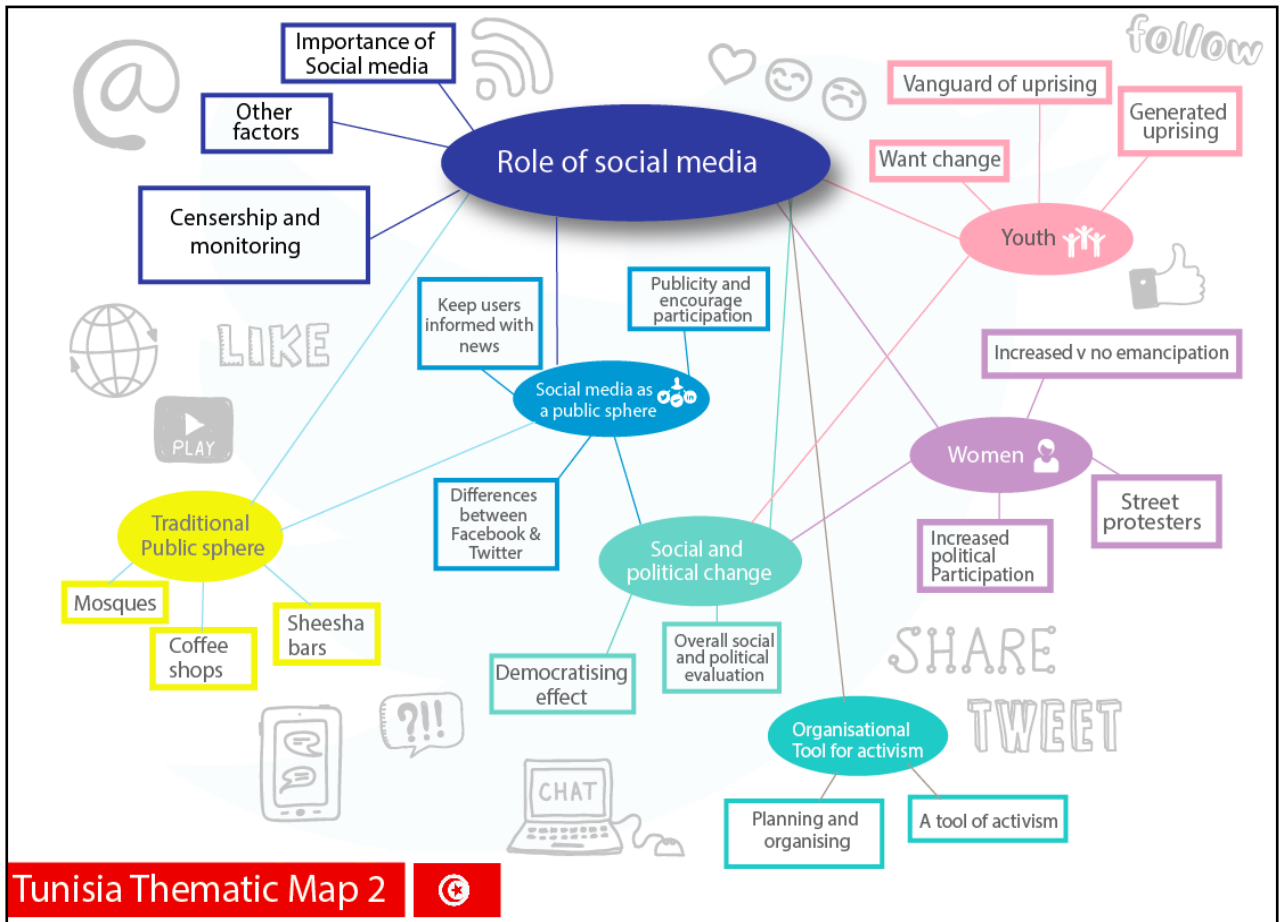


Figure 9: Tunisia Thematic Map 2

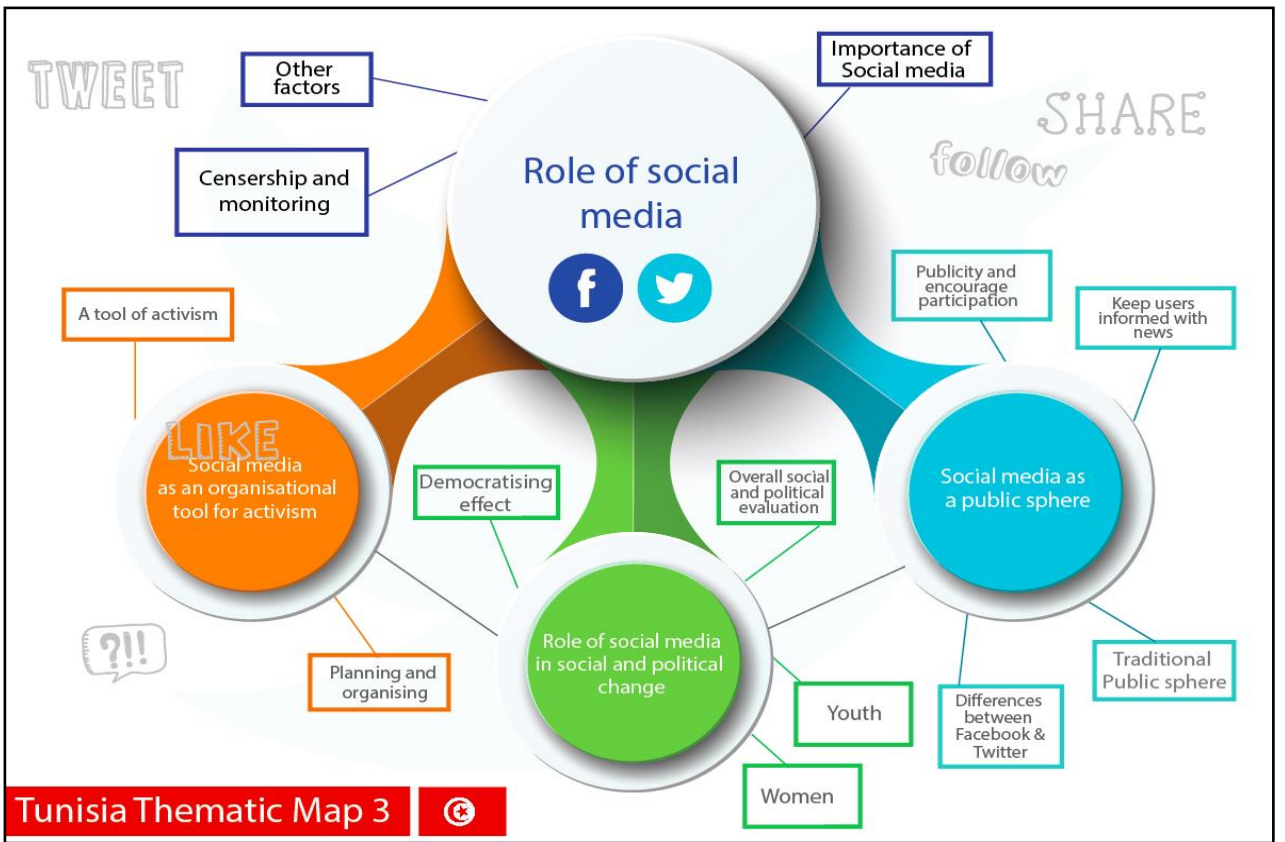


Figure 10: Tunisia Thematic Map 3

5.1.1 THEME 1: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE TUNISIAN UPRISING

5.1.1.1 Importance of social media

When discussing the role of social media during the Tunisian uprising, the Tunisian participants tended to agree that Facebook and Twitter were important in this regard. For example, respondent two described this with the following remarks:

They (Facebook and Twitter) were very influential for starting the Tunisian Revolution (Respondent Two).

Hence, respondent two drew attention to his perception that Facebook and Twitter were crucial in helping to start the uprising in Tunisia. This belief (that social media assisted in initiating the uprising) is a common idea arising from among the interviewees. For instance, respondent six supports this by stating:

The Arab Uprisings of 2011 were started in Tunisia....Facebook and Twitter.... were the media outlets where the uprising started in Tunisia. (Respondent Six)

In the following quotation, respondent five also highlights the effectiveness of social media in helping to start the Tunisian uprising. However, he takes this argument a stage further by suggesting that the uprising was only able to take place because of Facebook and Twitter:

Activism was successful in such a way as to create a revolution through social media. The revolution would never have happened without it (Facebook and Twitter) (Respondent Five).

Focusing more on Facebook rather than on Twitter, respondent one claims the Tunisian uprising could not have occurred without Facebook. He also suggests that

social media in general was the reason why the uprising ultimately succeeded in removing Ben Ali from power:

It is impossible for the revolution to take place without Facebook.....The new social methods of communication were the difference between success and failure during the uprising in Tunisia.....uprisings and workers' strikes had occurred in the past but had been crushed by the government force (Respondent One).

In other words, respondent one states that social media (most especially Facebook) made the difference by enabling this particular uprising to succeed - as compared to other uprisings in the past. In his opinion, past attempts had failed in Tunisia because activists did not rely on social media. On the other hand, whilst respondent three also praises the important role that social media played during the uprising, his enthusiasm is more conservative since he describes it as being just one of a number of different factors that helped the Tunisian uprising to succeed:

This use of social media was one of the main reasons why the protesters were able to achieve their objectives (Respondent Three).

The importance of social media in relation to these other different factors is now presented in the following section.

5.2.1.2 Social media versus other factors

In explaining the factors which caused the uprising to start, all six of the Tunisian interviewees tended to offer very similar reasons. In other words, all of them mentioned various causes of discontent among the people as well as their aspirations for a new future based upon democracy, freedom, and human rights. None of them showed unhappiness at the uprising having taken place, and none of them expressed

any support or sympathy for Ben Ali and his regime. For example, the following are extracts of comments that were made by the Tunisian interviewees:

The oppression of the police and security services became intolerable, intruding into the lives of the people and this caused lots of anger and resentment (Respondent One).

Most of the living standards and standards of education for Tunisians were quite good, especially when compared to other African countries....It was the desire to have political freedom and democratic rights that became the cause of the revolution (Respondent Three).

It was too many years with Ben Ali as the President...too much corruption and dictatorship.....everybody wanted change and a new start and there was excitement and hope for a new future (Respondent Four).

These comments acknowledge that Tunisians were very well-educated as compared to other African nations, and enjoyed a relatively high standard of living compared to other African nations. Yet, despite these relative advantages, the decades of authoritarianism, state corruption, and the lack of human rights experienced by the overwhelming majority of the population had become too much for most people to bear. Tunisians were desperate for social and political changes to be made to society based on democracy, freedom, and human rights; and these were the underlying causes of the uprising that only required a catalyst to set a revolution in motion.

When asked to explain the factors that caused the uprising to continue, and then to explain the factors that caused the uprising successfully to overthrow the president, it

was mentioned by three of the six interviewees that Mohammad Bouazizi's suicide had a significant effect. For example, interviewee six said:

The death of Mohammad Bouazizi united the nation and focused attention on the corrupt and brutal policies of the police.....With the spread of news on Al Jazeera and satellite TV so the protests increased and became larger (Respondent Six).

Therefore, while it is acknowledged that Mohammad Bouazizi's suicide was an incident that helped to initially galvanise and generate the Tunisian uprising, it is also recognised that Al Jazeera also had an influential role in both strengthening and sustaining the uprising. However, one of the six interviewees (respondent four) was far less enthusiastic about the effectiveness of social media. He stated:

I think word of mouth and the international TV channels were the ones that really kept the country updated on the events as they happened.....It's been exaggerated the effect of social media....It (social media) had few users (Respondent Four).

These remarks from respondent four are interesting because they appear to be based on certain facts, yet these remarks still need to be examined in closer detail in order to check their validity. For instance, international satellite channels (especially Al Jazeera) did play a role in raising national and international awareness of the uprising. However, as discussed in the chapter 'The Tunisian Uprising' with reference to Ben Gharbia, the role of Facebook was especially critical in the spreading of awareness of the uprising and it was a vital complement to Al Jazeera. In fact, Al Jazeera was heavily reliant upon images and information of the uprising from Facebook, particularly at the outset.

As for other major international news outlets, the investigation conducted in the chapter ‘The Tunisian Uprising’ suggests that these were slow in reporting news of the uprising. Social media, followed by Al Jazeera, were reporting on the Tunisian uprising a few days before the world’s mainstream media became involved. The additional remarks made by respondent four, that the effectiveness of social media has been exaggerated because it was subject to official censorship also has a degree of truth in that social media was monitored and censored. Yet the comments from most of the other interviewees indicate that the number of users who were posting news and information regarding the uprising had reached unprecedented numbers, and that many Tunisian people were finding the courage to publicise events despite the fear of reprisals from the regime. Faced with such an overwhelming response from users, it appears the authorities did not counter this situation sufficiently and so the uprising intensified and increased.

In addition, references were made to the personal bravery of the individual protesters as an important factor in generating and sustaining the uprising. For example, the following comments were made:

I was amazed at the courage of the Tunisian people and so many people were participating in the revolution. So the courage of the people was so strong and it could not be stopped even by the bullets of the police and their beating of the innocent civilian people (Respondent Two).

Only the unity of the protesters and their determination to throw off the chains of oppression are the reasons for kicking out Ben Ali from office (Respondent Three).

5.2.1.3 Role of censorship and monitoring

Monitoring and censoring could be expected to adversely affect social media's ability to function as both an open public sphere and as a communicational/operational tool for activism. Thus, bearing this in mind, it is noted that respondent four stated:

It was not safe to speak about the government on the phone and on the Internet. These were monitored (Respondent Four).

Such comments imply that Tunisians thought Facebook and Twitter were being monitored by the country's security apparatus and so it was dangerous to use social media as a forum for criticising the regime. Similarly, respondents two and four also highlight the control and monitoring of the Internet that occurred under the Ben Ali regime. They said:

The Internet had no freedom during the era of Ben Ali, with controls at Internet cafes where users had to produce proof of their identity and their use of the Internet was under surveillance (Respondent Two).

People were scared to speak their minds on Facebook about the political situation, there was fear of imprisonment and there were no human rights at that time....so Facebook use was limited in its potential (Respondent Four).

Thus, these respondents confirm that the Internet and social media activities of Tunisians were not free of government control during the time of Ben Ali, and indeed, it was shown in Chapter Four that the Internet was censored far more heavily in Tunisia compared to Egypt. Prior to the country's uprising, the Ben Ali regime used a range of controls to severely hinder free speech on social media and citizens

tended to believe that criticising the authoritarian government would lead to severe repercussions. However, among the above comments, only respondent four states that fear of regime reprisals actually limited social media's importance and effectiveness during the uprising. As respondent one explains:

The mainstream media was not free and so Facebook was the way many of us used for discussing such things (Respondent One).

Therefore, despite the Tunisian regime's monitoring/censoring of the Internet and its controls over Internet cafés, many of the people did overcome their fear of reprisals from the authorities in order to post comments in support of the uprising. Also, unlike Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Ali did not order the shutdown of social media or the Internet; and so the Tunisian activists successfully used social media as a tool to depose him from power. This is mentioned by respondent six as follows:

Facebook and all of the Internet, the TV and newspapers were all under the censorship of the government, but once the people had the courage to start uploading events onto Facebook then this encouraged others to do the same... I'm surprised actually that the whole system wasn't shut down. This is what happened in Egypt (Respondent Six).

These comments suggest that the bravery of social media users in criticising the regime gave encouragement to other users to do the same. Respondents two and five believe social media opposition then began to spread rapidly:

.....when the authorities realised its (Facebook and Twitter) danger so it was too late for them to do anything about it (Respondent Two).

The great advantage of Facebook and Twitter is their speed. It is such a fast form of communicating that the regime was caught unprepared (Respondent Five).

This suggests that social media opposition to the regime occurred with such speed that the Ben Ali regime was too slow to react to its threat. The speed of the Tunisian uprising, starting from the death of Bouazizi and culminating in Ben Ali's resignation, was so quick that even if the regime had shut down access to social media it is likely this would not have been enough to halt the momentum of the street protests. Within days, the uprising had inspired a series of mass protests extending all across Tunisia, and this soon resulted in Ben Ali abandoning power and fleeing the country. Ultimately, therefore, the regime's strategy of censoring and monitoring social media did not succeed because of rapid communication by brave, determined Tunisian users.

5.3.2 THEME 2: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

In order to clarify those findings which can be related directly to the theory of the public sphere, the conceptualisations of the public sphere (as examined in the literature review) will now be summarised here. Firstly within the literature review, the public sphere was described by DeLuca and Peebles (2002) as being a social space where citizens can discuss issues of public concern. It was also explained that the ideal public sphere should be a forum where people are able to engage in social/political conversations that are open and free (Fraser, 1990). In addition, Kluge and Hansen (2016) have stated that public sphere users should discuss and debate issues until they arrive at a common and agreed upon outcome, including suggestions and solutions for social/political issues. Ultimately, however, these public sphere discussions should directly influence the creation and establishment of

the state's social/political policies (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002). This is because the views of the public sphere participants are taken into consideration by the state's social and political policy makers (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002). Similarly, Arendt (1958) and Fraser (1990) have also argued that policies and the laws should be influenced by the public sphere since the government needs to take into consideration the opinions of the public sphere users (Arendt, 1958).

Overall, these conceptualisations of the public sphere tend to conform to the influential works of Habermas (1984; 1991; 2006). He proposed that new media technology produces a public sphere where discussions/debates via this new forum will generate social and political change (Habermas, 1984; 1991; 2006). Therefore, central to this argument, is his emphasis on increased conversations raising the public's awareness of particular issues, keeping them informed and increasing their political participation (Habermas, 1984; 1991; 2006). On the other hand, he also claimed that the public sphere was only accessible to middle class and upper class citizens, and not to women and the working class (Habermas, 1984; 1991). However, in contrast to supporters of the public sphere, critics such as Dajani (2011) have suggested that the traditional Arabic public sphere of mosques and coffee shops were more influential during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings.

Thus, bearing all of these issues in mind, the researcher has chosen to present the findings of social media as a potential public sphere under the following sub-themes: (A) Publicising the uprising and encouraging participation in it; (B) Keeping users informed with regular news of the uprising; (C) Differences in usage between Facebook and Twitter; and (D) Social media versus the traditional public sphere.

5.3.2.1 Publicising the Uprising and encouraging participation in it

The interviews generated findings which suggest that social media was an effective public sphere for spreading the message of the uprising as well as for encouraging participation. Yet it should be recognised that spreading the message refers to gaining publicity for the uprising, whereas encouraging participation refers to encouraging social media users to participate in the actual street protests. Bearing these definitions in mind, respondents one and six said:

Facebook was the best way that people had to get publicity for the revolution
(Respondent One).

When the time came to rise up after so many years of anger and frustration so this (social media) was the main way that the leaders of the revolution got their messages out to the people (Respondent Six).

The above comments point towards the perceived importance of social media as a significant generator of publicity for the Tunisian uprising, with leading activists relying heavily on them as a means of disseminating their message to the public. Likewise, respondent two made the following remark:

You can say that the social media helped the activists to get their message across..... with their messages and calls for a revolution (Respondent Two).

Here, respondent two highlights the use of social media for calling the people to rise up in a revolution against the Ben Ali regime. Therefore, with the messages of all of the mainstream media being heavily censored and exploited as a propaganda tool by the regime, Facebook and Twitter represented an outlet for Tunisian citizens to express themselves. Respondent three also mentioned that social media enabled users

to spread their message both internationally and nationally, and respondent five believes that messages of support and encouragement were spread through social media:

I was using Facebook to get our message out to the world (Respondent Three).

(Social media) spreads messages of support (Respondent Five)

In addition, although this study did not find significant evidence that social media was a public sphere which often changed people's opinions, the findings do imply that social media was an effective public sphere at persuading users to join the street protests. This is an important difference between changing users' opinions on the one hand versus persuading users to join the street protests on the other hand. A conclusion that can be drawn is that the overwhelming majority of these users (who were persuaded to participate in the demonstrations) were already of the opinion that participation on the streets was the right thing to do. Thus, it appears that the discussions on social media just gave them that final encouragement to switch from online to offline activism.

Thus, in reviewing the findings, it is apparent that the majority of interviewees (four out of six) believe that social media was a forum which did enable people to be persuaded to join the street protests. For example, with respect to the use of social media as a place for political debates, respondent five stated:

Social media provided the people with a new platform to chat between themselves and talk about the problems in the country (Respondent Five).

Furthermore, respondents two and five clearly express their perception that social media encouraged users to actively participate in the uprising:

Facebook and Twitter had a strong effect on encouraging the nation to join the street demonstrations (Respondent Two).

...with Facebook having a great part in encouraging people to take part (Respondent Five).

However, although respondents one and six are supportive of respondents two and five regarding social media as a public sphere that encouraged participation in the uprising, it should be noted that two of the six respondents (respondents three and four) do not believe social media is an opinion-changing forum. In fact, both of these respondents draw attention to the cultural characteristics of Tunisians, claiming they are a people who tend to hold firmly onto their existing beliefs. As explained by respondent four:

We are a tolerant people but we do not change our opinions easily because we can be stubborn. This is a characteristic of who we are (Respondent Four).

Yet, even if Tunisians are generally stubborn in holding onto their existing opinions, this is not necessarily at odds with social media being utilised to encourage people to participate in the uprising. This is because many Tunisians already held the view that the Ben Ali regime should be removed from power, and so social media just gave them that extra encouragement to bring this about, rather than having to persuade them to switch from a pro-regime stance to an anti-regime stance. It seems likely that the years of authoritarian dictatorship under Ben Ali had pushed Tunisians to the point of exasperation, and so many may have already been prepared to take part in demonstrations.

5.3.2.2 Keeping users informed with regular news of the Uprising

The findings provide evidence that social media was important to activists and general users as a forum for sharing information and news regarding the Tunisian uprising. Thus, this adds further credibility to the idea that Facebook and Twitter did function with aspects of a public sphere during the Tunisian Uprising. Most of the interviewees and their comments were positive regarding the effectiveness of social media as a public sphere where users were able to share information and spread news of the uprising. However, whereas spreading the ‘message’ (as discussed in the previous sub-section above) relates to the dissemination of the users’ political and ideological conversations on social media, spreading the ‘news’ refers to the actual events that were taking place during the uprising. For example, respondents two and five said:

Images and texts informed people of what was actually happening (Respondent Two).

.....until revolutionary images were uploaded and this is when things started to change and the nation became aware there were protests in different cities (Respondent Five).

These comments highlight the respondents’ perceptions that social media’s images and written text of events (related to the uprising) were important for informing citizens of what was occurring on the streets of certain cities. Since the information broadcast by mainstream media was completely censored by the regime, social media was vital for raising awareness among the general population of Tunisia. In this vein, respondents one and six commented:

This is how the first stories were circulated and this is how the revolution became known – through the Facebook users. (Respondent One).

I was using Facebook to tell them the truth about what was happening (Respondent Six).

These statements by respondents one and six emphasise the crucial part that social media is said to have played in spreading news of the uprising during its earliest stages, especially truthful news free of government censorship. Bearing in mind the importance of getting the uprising off to a successful beginning, such comments are significant. It was further mentioned by respondent one that:

So much information was being shared that the authorities could not control all of this. It was so much volume (Respondent One).

In other words, respondent one implies that the quantity of information being exchanged on social media was huge. In fact, respondent one believes the amount of information that was shared was so high that the regime's personnel were unable to monitor and censor all of it. Thus, this again points towards Facebook and Twitter functioning as a public sphere, with its capacity to successfully share information and spread news of the uprising.

5.3.2.3 Differences in usage between Facebook and Twitter

A close examination of the findings suggests there were differences in the usage and the effectiveness of Facebook and Twitter. For example, Twitter had far fewer users (compared to Facebook), which is explained by respondent six as follows:

Twitter was best for a small group from the educated middle class youth (Respondent Six).

This comment by respondent six draws attention to Twitter users being a numerically tiny group at the time of the Tunisian uprising. This group was drawn overwhelmingly from well-educated youth from the middle class. Yet, as discussed in the literature review, a high proportion of the protesters were also very poor individuals who were often illiterate. It was also mentioned by respondents four and one that:

Twitter was not as significant as Facebook – it was still a very new technology and there were few users of Twitter (Respondent Four).

Twitter was more used for rapid messaging between people but not many people had use of this technology at this time....Facebook can be described as effective (Respondent One).

Thus, a distinction has been made between Facebook and Twitter, claiming that Facebook had a more influential role compared to Twitter. Given the high levels of media and Internet monitoring/censoring by the Ben Ali regime, Facebook was very useful for disseminating news regarding the uprising and the events surrounding it. On the other hand, Twitter was a relatively new concept in late 2010 and early 2011, and so only a tiny minority of activists were using Twitter for activities supporting the uprising.

5.3.2.4 Social media versus the traditional public sphere

With regard to investigating if the traditional public sphere helped to start and/or sustain the Tunisian uprising, the researcher wanted to further investigate the concept of social media as a public sphere during the Tunisian uprising. However, in reviewing the interviewees' responses, it is apparent that the overwhelming

consensus was that the traditional public sphere had virtually no role to play in generating the Tunisian uprising.

The mosque had no role in this uprising. This uprising was made by the ordinary people and their willingness to sacrifice their lives.....killing starting and the police were beating the protesters on the streets, but the people did not give up and this brought the end to the regime (Respondent One).

Tunisia is not as religious as some other Muslim countries and so the imam in Tunisia does not have such a big effect as in other countries, and the imams are not able to create an uprising because their powers have been weakened (Respondent Three).

These comments highlight the fact that Tunisia was not a particularly religious nation, as compared to other Muslim nations in the world. As will be discussed later in this section, Tunisians (especially the youth) are great admirers of Western culture; having a great love for the West's democratic systems, individual freedom, fashionable clothing, music, and Hollywood movies. The influence of Islam, and therefore of religious leaders such as Imams and Sheikhs (Islamic scholars), is negligible. On the other hand, respondent four did say:

Coffee shops and the smoking bars had a small role because the students would sometimes go there and talk about politics (Respondent Four).

Therefore, although the mosques had almost no influence as a public sphere for generating the uprising in Tunisia, there is some evidence that the traditional coffee shops and sheesha (smoking) shops did have a role. Whilst it is difficult to measure exactly how influential the coffee shops and sheesha shops were as a public sphere

when compared to social media, it seems clear these were far more effective than the mosques or other potential public spheres. Overall, therefore, relying on the information provided by the interviewees, social media was the most influential public sphere because of its vital role in starting and sustaining the Tunisian Uprising. Yet the coffee shops and smoking shops had a much smaller supportive role.

5.3.3 THEME 3: SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ORGANISATIONAL TOOL FOR ACTIVISM

5.3.3.1 A tool for activism, planning and organizing

A research aim of this thesis is to examine the potential role of Facebook and Twitter as communicational and organisational tools during the Tunisian uprising. Thus, in order to achieve this aim, the researcher collated the interviewees' comments related to the effectiveness of social media as tools for organising and building the movement. Although the amount of text presented in this theme is relatively small as compared to the other themes, nonetheless the findings of this theme were separated from the other themes due to their importance in directly addressing research question number two. For instance, the following was mentioned by respondent five:

It's true that Facebook and other aspects of social networking were crucial for helping the protesters to keep in contact with each other (Respondent Five).

Here, respondent five is focusing on the important role that social media played in assisting protesters in maintaining their communications with one another. In this sense, social media could also be regarded as establishing and improving connections between the organisers of the protest groups, activists who were members of protest groups, ordinary citizens who became protesters on the street and also indoor users.

Indeed, respondent five adds further detail to this idea, as does respondent one, with the following comments:

The Internet was the life blood of the uprising since this meant that the meeting places for the protests could be communicated and arranged.....it (the protests) appeared to be very spontaneous with the meeting places being arranged only a day or two beforehand (Respondent Five).

The activists set up the meeting points for the protests through it (social media) and maintained their contact with each other throughout the period.....this allowed them (the activists) to be efficient and organised in their activities (Respondent One).

Therefore, social media allowed Internet connection to become a crucial organisational and communicational tool for the opposition movement during the Tunisian uprising. It was used to organise street protests by communicating the locations, dates and times of the demonstrations between users. Thereafter, during the actual street protests, social media also allowed the protesters to communicate with each other, which was described as enabling the opposition movement to be organised effectively. This idea of organisational efficiency was also described by respondent two:

It was a people's movement but the people passed instructions between them and so the organisation of the people was high and it worked (Respondent Two).

By contrast, however, respondent four suggests that the opposition movement was disorganised because there was no single leader who united the opposition with an agreed plan of aims and objectives:

The impression I got was there was no overall leader and no clear set of objectives
(Respondent Four).

Overall, this researcher found that the participants were mostly positive regarding the role of Facebook and Twitter as communicational tools for activism, although there was some disagreement as to how well-organised the Facebook and Twitter activists actually were. In other words, although social media was a valuable communication tool which allowed the activists to plan and implement their activities, there are those respondents who did not believe the activists were well organised because they did not have a clear leadership structure. On the other hand, other respondents stated that the social media activists were well organised, and this seems to be confirmed by the fact that the uprising in Tunisia was successful in toppling Ben Ali from power and then establishing democracy.

5.3.4 THEME 4: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

5.3.4.1 Social media as a democratising force

Four of the six respondents claimed social media has assisted in delivering important political changes in Tunisia. For example, the following was stated by respondent five:

The Tunisian uprising became an unstoppable force because these (Facebook and Twitter) new tools changed the country into an uprising that brought democracy
(Respondent Five).

Respondent five believed Facebook and Twitter were the main reasons why the Tunisian uprising brought open and fair democratic elections to the country. A direct

link is made between the use of social media as tools for activism on the one hand, and the delivery of democracy on the other hand. Similarly, respondent six said:

Now we have our human rights and political freedom...After the grace of God this was due to the peoples' determination and bravery...and to social media as making this happen (Respondent Six).

Although respondent six refers to the power of God as well as to the courage of the people as contributory factors to the successful establishment of genuine elections in Tunisia, he further acknowledges that social media was another important element. With the uprising also leading to the removal of Ben Ali from power, respondent six associates social media usage with the country attaining human rights following years of the regime's authoritarianism. Respondent two seems to support this by saying:

..... to change the government and overthrow the Ben Ali regime after all these years of oppression. It was this new media that gave hope to the nation and gave the belief there could be freedom and a new beginning...It is the hope that comes from the new media that really changed everybody, and this time it could really be a new life (Respondent Two).

Therefore, similar to respondent six, respondent two also highlighted the feeling of relief that social media had finally helped to end decades of Ben Ali's oppressive dictatorship. In addition, bearing in mind that the interviews for this thesis were conducted just over two years after the removal of Ben Ali as President, respondent two's remarks reveal the people's great hopes for the future. There were high levels of positive anticipation regarding the country's future and this positivity was directly

associated with the new tools of social media. It was also mentioned by respondent one that:

We are the only country from the Arab Spring that has succeeded in the transition from authoritarianism to full democracy, and Facebook had a crucial part to play in that process (Respondent One).

Therefore, these comments explain that Tunisia is unique in two important ways. Firstly, it was the first Arab country of the so-called Arab Spring, where the people rose up in mass protest against the ruling authoritarian regime. Secondly, of the dozen or so Arab countries that participated in these mass protests, Tunisia is the only one that has implemented democracy with a reasonable level of political stability. Importantly, however, the general consensus of the respondents is that social media had a critical role to play as a democratising force by directly assisting in the establishment of democracy from the country's 2010 - 2011 uprising.

5.3.4.2 Social media and youth

When evaluating social media's role in generating social and political change during the Tunisian uprising, the contribution made by the youth in this regard should not be under-estimated. The youth were the vanguard of the uprising by organising and leading the street protests through social media with exceptionally high levels of energy, determination, commitment and bravery. In a country where the population had tolerated authoritarianism and corruption for decades, the 2010/2011 uprising witnessed the emergence of a new generation that was no longer willing to quietly accept a continuation of the status quo. Challenging the traditional cultural attitude of respect and silence when in the company of one's elders, the youth were now vocal and active in rejecting the social and political system being imposed by the old ruling

elite. Thus, in terms of social and political change, this researcher found that social media activists came overwhelmingly from the youth. Examples of relevant remarks made are as follows:

It was the youth, young men and women, that started the uprising with social media acting as Internet activists, informing the population of events and encouraging them to join the uprising.....that is when older men and women joined the youth and this became a national protest movement for liberty and change (Respondent three).

This type of comment is representative of the participants, and it illustrates the important role of the youth as influential social media activists. It was the youth that had the drive and courage to instigate the Tunisian uprising, as well as having the steadfastness to maintain the uprising's momentum. Without this impetus from the young social media activists it is most likely that the Tunisian uprising would not have succeeded. Only after the youth had initiated the demonstrations did the older citizens feel able to join the street protests.

5.3.4.3 Social media and women

The findings of this thesis suggest that social media played an important role in developing women's emancipation during the Tunisian Uprising. However it should also be noted that such positivity was not agreed upon by all of the interviewees. For, although Tunisia is relatively liberal and westernised compared to many Islamic countries, nonetheless women still tend to have a more traditional role at home and of not going out to work when compared to women living in Western countries. In fact, respondent six is rather negative when discussing social media's emancipatory potential for women.

Facebook hasn't changed the lives of most women in Tunisia. They have their traditional Islamic role within the family at home, and this is still the same situation (Respondent six).

On the other hand, however, most of the other respondents have a different perspective. For example, respondents two and four said:

Tunisia has always been more liberal than most other Muslim countries, yet Facebook and Twitter increased further the freedom and rights of women....they (women) participated in the demonstrations next to the men taking the same risks and facing the same dangers from the security forces (Respondent two).

Thus, although a few women may have been present at previous street demonstrations, the uprising of 2010/2011 was unique because of the huge numbers of women (especially young women) who actively participated on this particular occasion. Within a culture where women usually stay at home and do not become involved in protests outside, their new active participation has been described as having been linked to their social media usage:

Women were political activists on Facebook just as much as the men. Actually they were leaders too (Respondent two).

Furthermore, the uprising led to an increase in women's participation in the subsequent elections and political processes:

We now have many more women involved in politics and many women have been elected into the parliament (Respondent four).

The general consensus of the interviewees is that the uprising and the ensuing parliamentary elections witnessed significant increases in female participation in

activism, at work and in politics. Importantly, however, the majority opinion of the respondents is that social media played a vital role in this regard.

5.3.4.4 Overall evaluation of social media and social/political change

In terms of the overall role that social media played in social and political change during the Tunisian uprising, there was a general perception among the respondents that social media contributed towards modernising Tunisian society. For example, in discussing the ways in which Facebook and Twitter have modernised society, the following comments are typical examples:

The new Internet services have brought Tunisia into the global community...globalisation has developed Tunisia (Respondent two).

Attitudes have really changed and are better because of social networking. We are now in regular contact with other peoples and other cultures from around the world and this has opened our minds to innovations (Respondent five).

These statements indicate that respondents perceived social media as assisting the development of the country through its global dimension. In other words, general users and activists within Tunisia became regular communicators with numerous foreign users from different parts of the world. Thus, bearing in mind that Tunisia may be regarded as a developing country, social media played a crucial role in directly exposing its citizens to other cultures and different ideas. In particular, the Tunisian youth (who were the main users of social media as well as the generators of the country's uprising) were especially influenced by Western social and cultural norms.

We (the youth) want our freedom....like they have got in Europe and America
(Respondent three).

This suggests that Facebook and Twitter were influential in formulating the minds of the Tunisian youth in favour of demanding democracy and an end to authoritarianism. Therefore, the interaction of the Tunisian youth with social media users from democratic countries appears to have been influential in generating support for the idea of social/political change. Overall, five of the six respondents believed social media had contributed towards changing Tunisian society. Yet this perception goes beyond the idea that social media helped to modernise the country by exposing its people to concepts and ideas from other countries. Importantly, as discussed in the women's sub-section above, the increase in women's emancipation may be regarded as a part of this modernising of Tunisian society (as perceived by the interviewees of this research).

On the other hand, however, it should be remembered that the interviews for this thesis were carried out about two and a half years after the start of the uprising. This was a period of high hopes and expectations for the people of a country that was now in the process of genuine social and political reform. Nonetheless, in order to properly evaluate the respondents' optimism that social/political change was actually occurring, these findings will be analysed in the Analysis/Discussion Chapter. In addition, within the Conclusion Section of this thesis, the researcher will present evidence regarding the current social/political as it is today; thereby enabling the research to be brought up to date.

5.2 PART B: FINDINGS FROM EGYPTIAN INTERVIEWS:

Before setting out the findings from the Egyptian interviews, the three Egyptian thematic maps are presented here. These maps show how the themes and sub-themes for Egypt were gradually combined and reduced. A full listing of all the final main themes and final sub-themes that were created for Egypt can be found in the appendix.

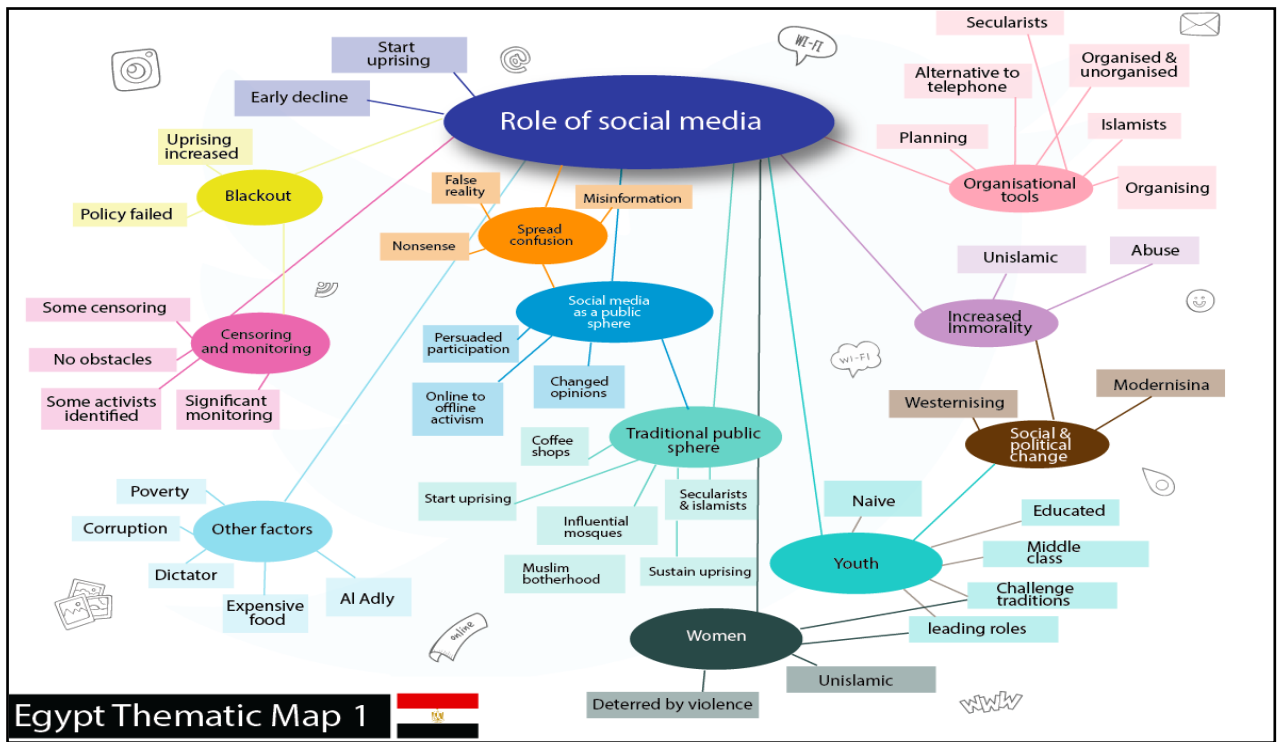


Figure 11: Egypt Thematic Map 1

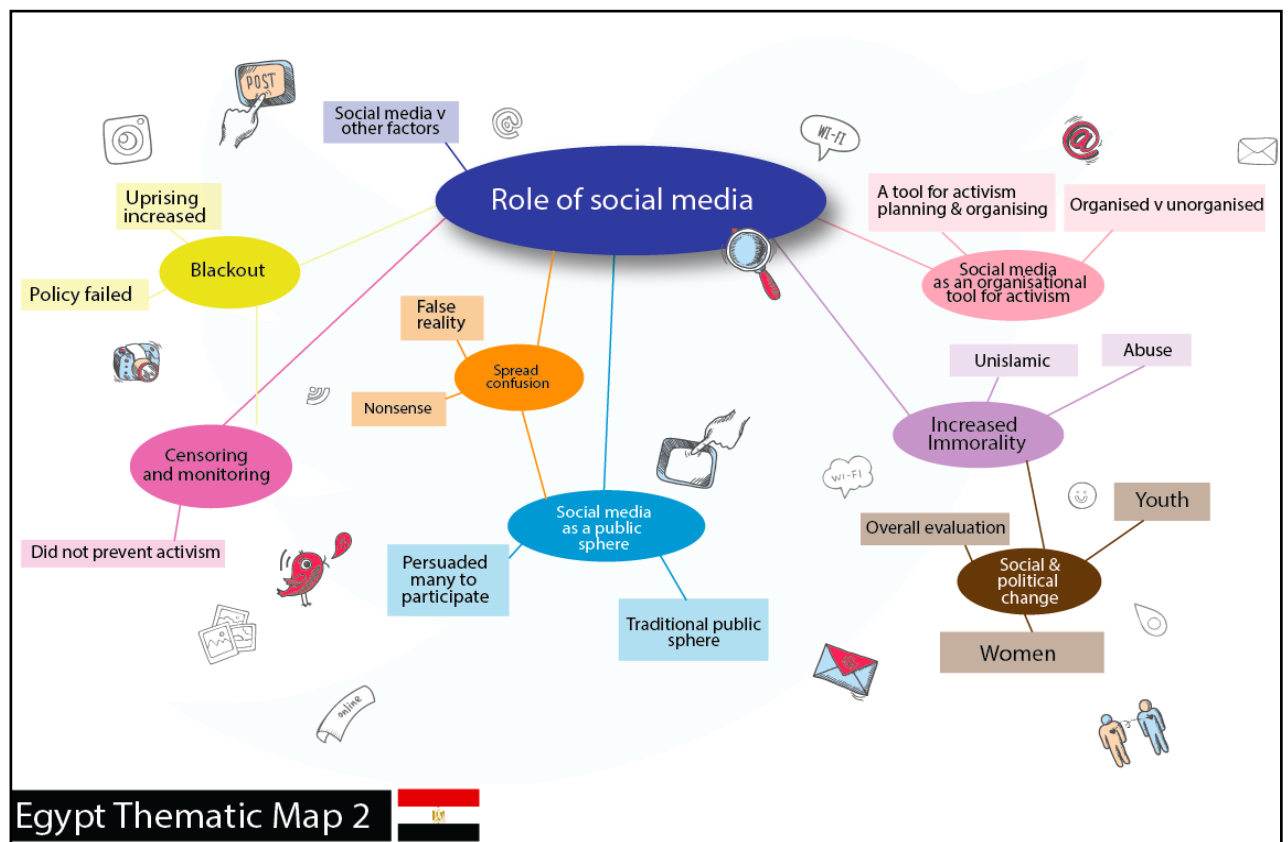


Figure 12: Egypt Thematic Map 2

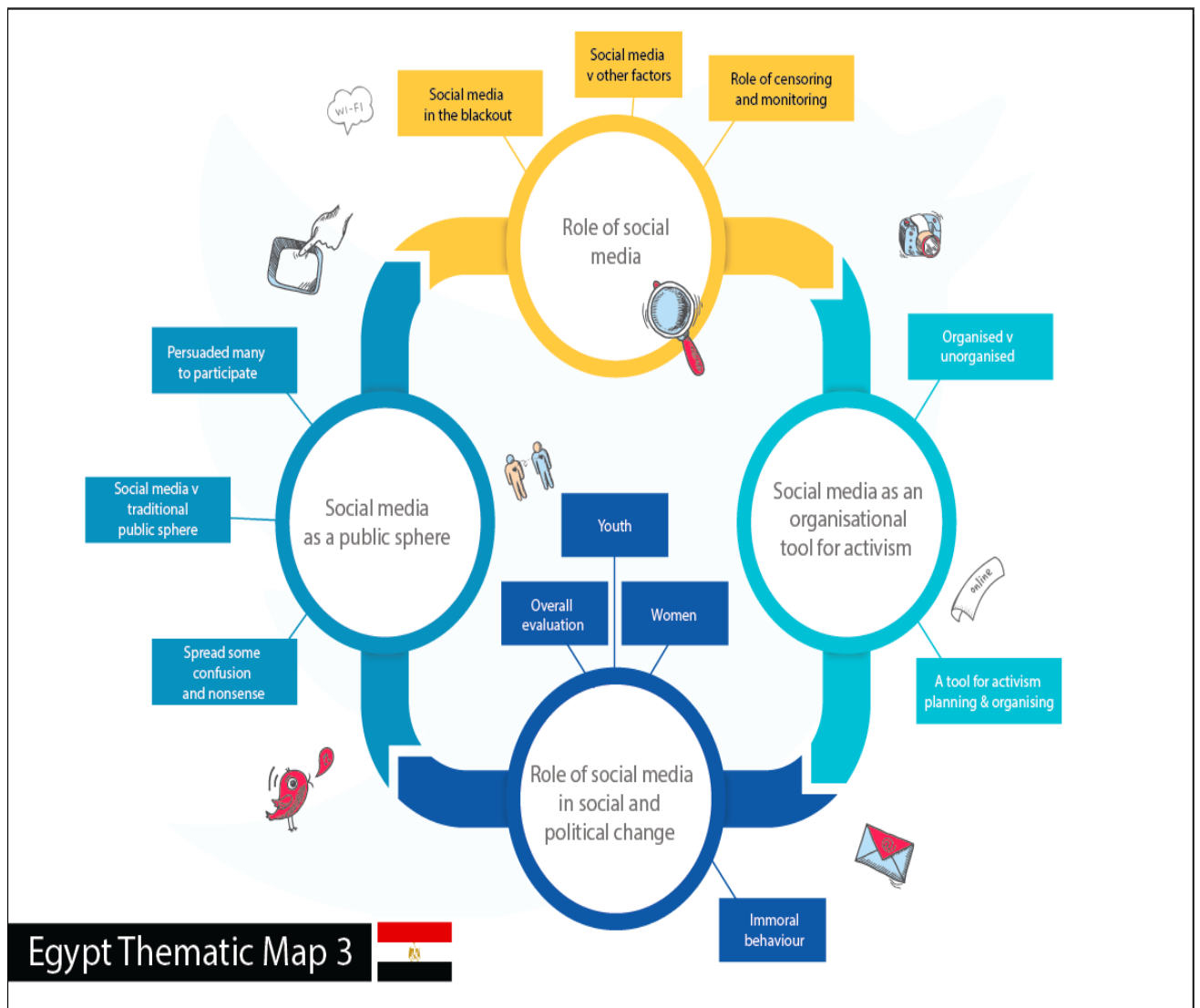


Figure 13: Egypt Thematic Map 3

5.4.1 THEME 1: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE EGYPTIAN UPRISING

5.4.1.1 Social media versus other factors

In terms of the role that social media had in generating the Egyptian uprising, it was found that many respondents said a variety of other factors contributed (along with social media) to the start and sustaining of the uprising. However, the respondents did tend to offer similar reasons as to why the uprising started in their country. For example, the following explanation was given by respondents 1 and 2:

The bad economic situation, extreme poverty and high unemployment rate reaching 18 to 19% in the Egyptian society were behind the Egyptian revolution; rich people were becoming even richer while poor people kept getting poorer (Respondent 1).

Corruption...the economic situation...and can't be accepted anymore (Respondent 2).

These comments are typical of the type of answers that were given to explain the causes of the Egyptian uprising. The reasons are said to be based mainly on economic/social factors on the one hand and political factors on the other hand. However, although the researcher has classified the respondents' answers into these categories, it is recognized that these categories are not always clearly divisible from each other. There is sometimes a grey area where various factors could overlap from one category to another; for example, corruption could be regarded as an economic issue because it impacts directly on the functioning of the economy's market forces. Yet corruption could also be regarded as a social issue because it affects the fabric of society and how individuals interact with one another. Also, it might also be regarded as a political issue because it is a problem that needs to be tackled politically, preferably with the support of legislation from the government, if it is to be dealt with effectively.

Bearing in mind the fact that certain causes of the Egyptian uprising might overlap from one category to another, the economic/social causes that were often mentioned include the extreme inequality in the distribution of wealth. Whilst severe poverty was being experienced by much of the population, a small number of Egyptians were living a life of incredible wealth and luxury. This perceived unfairness in the distribution of income was one of the factors that became unacceptable to the wider

population, perhaps partly triggered by the rising costs of basic food stuffs. As the poor struggled to afford basic items, such as bread, in order to survive, it seems this desperation was a contributory cause that encouraged them to demonstrate. The demands of the demonstrators were reflected in their slogan of 'Bread and Freedom' that was written on banners and chanted by the people. Interestingly, this slogan also reflected the call for affordable basic foodstuffs (bread) and social/political change (freedom).

Bread and Freedom are aspects that shaped events and cause the revolution to continue (Respondent 2).

All the categories including workers, farmers, students, the youth and all of society's categories went out on the 25th of January demanding "Bread, Freedom and Social Justice (Respondent 9).

In addition to the severe poverty being experienced by a large section of Egyptian society, as well as the injustice of corruption, there were other social factors that were said to contribute to the uprising. These were described as the brutal behaviour of the police and the frustration felt by the country's youth. In particular, the high rate of unemployment meant that most of the youth could not find employment, even if they were well-educated graduates from university. If they were fortunate enough to find employment, this tended to be menial work with low pay. The sense of anger and frustration that was growing is described by respondent 4:

The deteriorated economic conditions and the aggressive treatment of police came on the top of the pressures which led people to rebel against their regimes; in addition to the unemployment ratio that kept increasing day after day that led huge numbers of university graduates either to stay jobless and loiter aimlessly in coffee shops or to work in cafeterias, bakeries or factories to earn their living. Such conditions drove young people to poverty, hungry (sic) and depression (Respondent 4).

Respondent 5 also highlighted the economic/social issues contributing to the frustration of the youth: high unemployment, corruption, police oppression, and the huge inequality in the distribution of income. However, this respondent also draws attention to two additional factors. Firstly, he mentions a political concern whereby Mubarak cheated in the elections and gave himself a huge majority by rigging the results. This made a mockery of democracy and further contributed to the general sense of injustice among the population. Secondly, respondent 5 makes another important point when he says that the middle class also felt marginalized through such injustice. He argued that it is the middle class which historically brings about reform by leading revolutionary change in society, and so it was in Egypt he says. When the middle classes felt they were suffering too much, they became the important driving force of the uprising. Respondent 5 says:

The marginality of youth and forgery of previous parliament elections....there is no solution for reforming the regime and so it must be changed; as the regime gained in these elections 98% of the parliament seats in a way that did not happen before. Forgery was very clear and disgusted most of Egyptians in addition to ordinary problems such as unemployment and corruption....oppression of the police,

monopoly of the country's resources by a group of businessmen, incredible gaps between the rich and the poor, and the marginality of the middle class that always makes change in most revolutions. There are many economic, social and cultural reasons that contributed in making the revolution (Respondent 5).

It is also important to note that many respondents, such as respondent 4 above, mentioned the oppression and harsh treatment of the police. For example, respondent 14 says the experience of a poor person being taken to the police station can be compared to hell. This suggests that the police of Mubarak's dictatorial regime were brutal and often inflicted physical beatings on people, which was increasingly likely if the person was poor. The implication is that the underlying oppressive nature of the regime was especially difficult for poor people because they are economically and financially weak. As respondent 14 explains:

Poverty in the society or injustice in distributing the wealth...real suppression by the security...and so the idea of going to the police station is like going to the hell for any poor person who is suppressed and whose political freedom is very limited

(Respondent 14).

In discussing the causes of the Egyptian uprising, several respondents went further in explaining the significance of police oppression as a motivator for the protesters. These respondents argued that the main reason for the demonstrations was actually to demand the resignation of Habib Al Adly. This man was the Minister of the Interior and so he was ultimately responsible for the functioning and behaviour of the police. Furthermore, it is claimed that it was Mubarak's refusal to meet the protesters' demands to remove Al Adly which caused the demonstrations to intensify.

Therefore, with Mubarak unwilling to compromise or back down over the issue of Al Adly, the protesters began to demand the resignation of Mubarak himself. Increasingly huge numbers of people continued to join these street demonstrations until this became a huge revolutionary uprising of unstoppable force.

Respondent 5 mentioned the issue of Al Adly, as well as the demand of some protesters for the dissolution of parliament (the People's Council) and new, fair elections. He said:

The reasons for the revolution continuing were the regime's mistakes. It could have stopped the 25th of January protests if it had responded quickly to the requests of most Egyptians, but the regime responded too late. Leadership change was not the request on the 25th of January; the public was only making a complaint on the regime policies and not a revolution. Especially the basic request of 25th of January was the dismissal of the Minister of Interior, Habib Al Adly, and dissolving the People's Council (Mubarak's government). These were the two main requests on 25th of January. If Mubarak had dismissed the Minister of Interior, dissolved the People's Council, named the dates of parliament elections, and promised to hold honest elections then the 25th of January movement might have been suppressed as people did not gather for revolution, but for these reasons (Respondent 5).

Similar explanations regarding the protesters' demands for Al Adly's resignation are as follows:

The people on 25th of January didn't request the ousting of Mubarak but it was a request only to the dismiss Minister of the Interior Habib El Adly. The government started rigidity against the people and didn't respect their wishes, so also some kind of rigidity of the people started. And the extent of their requests increased so they

said we don't only want to dismiss the Minister of the Interior but also the ousting of the regime. But there was no response and if there had been an early response then the people would have been calm and returned back to their homes' (respondent 7)

'On 25th of January we did not request the end of the regime. We objected to torture and the best of our ambitions was to dismiss Habib Al Adly, the minister of interior, but the regime's harsh response increased our resolve. And so maybe the most important reasons were the inability and old age of Mubarak and his assistances as he did not respond quickly to the requests of the people and this is an important reason (Respondent 8).

Respondent 9 also mentioned Al Adly when he listed the reasons for the Egyptian uprising:

Dictatorship, injustice...suppression...anyone who opposed Mubarak was imprisoned, tortured and accused falsely with many charges..... the suppressing government of the Ministry of Interior headed by Habib Al Adly (Respondent 9).

Respondent 12 is another who says the initial reasons for the uprising were for improved economic conditions and the removal of Al Adly. However, he says this changed and the protesters' demands intensified after the Al Jamal battle (the Camels' battle). This was the moment when regime thugs, riding on camels, charged into the peaceful demonstrators in an effort to intimidate them. However, the demonstrators were not dissuaded from protesting on the streets as they had been persuaded in the past. On this occasion the people were bravely defiant and continued with the uprising.

The revolution did not start but it was only some requests to improve the economic status and lighten the interior restrictions. Until Al Jamal battle occurred and then the resignation of Mubarak on 30th of July. We requested some reforming demands to dismiss Al Adly regime and change some aspects in the constitution, but these demands were not fulfilled; so the revolution continued (Respondent 12).

In contrast to the bleak scenario of issues (such as poverty, high unemployment, corruption, and police oppression) mentioned by most respondents, respondent 3 offered a different perspective. As a loyalist supporter of Mubarak, respondent 3 said:

Husni Mubarak's ruling years were very longand the Egyptian people get bored and desired to make a change in spite of the great stability in his governing period. And the standard of living of all Egyptian people was high (but) the middle class started to connect with media and social communication networks, Internet, international societies networks and.... wanted the external global standards applied inside Egypt (Respondent 3).

Respondent 3 argues that Mubarak was a leader who brought about political stability, large increases in the general standard of living, and widespread construction of and improvements to Egypt's cities and infrastructure. He claims the uprising started due to two main reasons. Firstly, the people had become tired of Mubarak because he had been ruling for so many years and they wanted change. Secondly, the new forces of globalization (such as social media) were bringing different cultures and new perspectives into the minds of Egyptians. In fact, respondent 3 claims that these forces of globalization were especially influential because they encouraged some Egyptians to seek the same social and political conditions as in the West.

5.4.1.2 Role of censorship and monitoring

In examining whether or not social media was an open public sphere that helped to start and/or sustain the Egyptian uprising, it was found that most respondents believed social media was being monitored by the authorities. Hence, such negative comments suggest that social media could not be described as being completely open at the time of the uprising. For example, respondents seven and thirteen said:

There is also monitoring because any Intelligence Body can analyze the chats and take information from it. You can entice a person to enter and discuss matters by saying "I'm Mohammed" and you aren't, but you are an intelligence agent or spy (Respondent 7).

'A user can become easily known to the security bodies' (Respondent 13).

These interviewees explain that a disadvantage of social media is that the authorities can monitor its communication and identify activists. This includes agents of the authorities using social media and pretending to be activists or ordinary people in order to join social media conversations. Thus, it is possible that, as a result of such clandestine tactics, genuine activists might have been arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. Overall, however, it should also be recognized that only these two interviewees (respondents seven and thirteen) were concerned that social media monitoring was actually hindering political communication on Facebook and Twitter. The overwhelming majority believed social media represented a (monitored or open) public sphere where social and political discussions took place. As explained by interviewee twelve:

The activists were able to use Facebook and Twitter for transferring information in spite of it being a difficult method containing obstacles, such as the security restrictions and the different security checking (Respondent 12).

However, whilst acknowledging that the Mubarak regime was monitoring and (to a lesser extent) censoring social media, the respondents still tended to believe that such obstacles did not prevent it from acting as a public forum. The following remarks are typical examples of what respondents said:

There were no obstacles (Respondent 2).

I do not think any barriers prevented Facebook or Twitter or the Internet in general. (Respondent 10).

However, although most respondents believe activists communicated on social media with a high degree of freedom during the uprising of 2011, the perception is there has since been significant change in Egypt. With regard to the situation at the time of conducting these interviews (2014), it has been stated by a few interviewees that social media censorship and control are now extensive. For instance, interviewees nine and thirteen said:

The demonstrations have increased in the streets now and we see strong control from the current government that encourages arresting the demonstrators in the streets and those who express their views. (Respondent 9).

Most of the Muslim Brotherhood supporters no longer publish on Twitter as before....now activists do not use Facebook and Twitter as they think they are under security control (Respondent 13).

At the time of conducting the interviews, General Sisi had just been elected President of Egypt following a military coup that had toppled President Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, after a period of relative media freedom under both Mubarak and Morsi, it now appears that the country is entering a period of widespread media censorship, along with the arrest and imprisonment of thousands of political opponents of Sisi. Those censored and imprisoned include social media activists, secularists, and the entire leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamed, 2014).

This thesis was undertaken during a period of great expectation, especially in terms of many people's hopes that Egypt was in a process of transition from dictatorship towards democracy. Yet Sisi's election as President was accompanied by his extensive crackdown on freedom of speech across all sectors of Egyptian society, including social media. The monitoring and censoring of social media has become so much more prevalent than during the Mubarak era that interviewees often expressed concern and pessimism for the future. For example, respondents two and seven stated:

Dreams are fading.....Stability and strong government control complement each other (Respondent Two).

Maybe the Egyptian people are not yet ready for democracy (Respondent 7).

In short, the perception of such respondents is that a return to an authoritarian form of government may be necessary in order to bring the on-going street demonstrations and public disorder to an end. Likewise, there is a suggestion that the population is somehow unready for or incapable of adopting full democracy and so a continuation of authoritarianism is needed at this point in time. Of course such attitudes offer

some justification for Sisi's claims that media censoring and monitoring is a necessarily good thing for Egyptian society.

In the Conclusion to this thesis, the social and political conditions in Egypt will be brought up-to-date by reviewing the situation as it is today in 2016. This updating will allow an overview to be made of social media's role in generating social and political change from the start of the uprising until now (late 2016). Therefore the opinions expressed by the respondents of this thesis's interviews should be regarded as capturing thoughts and perceptions at a particular moment in 2013.

5.4.1.3 Social media during the blackout

During the Egyptian Uprising, an Internet blackout was imposed by the Mubarak regime in an attempt to disrupt the activists' communications. Yet, although this action by the Mubarak regime could be regarded as proving the importance of social media during this period, some respondents refer to this as evidence of social media's declining influence during this latter phase of the Egyptian uprising. The reasoning of such respondents is that the uprising actually increased during the Internet blackout, and so social media could not have had an important practical role during that period. On the other hand, it has been mentioned that the Internet blackout caused many parents to join the protests out of worry and concern for their children (the social media youth activists) and so this actually increased the size of the demonstrations. For instance, respondent seven said:

Facebook was the main tool to instigate the revolution but there is something important which is that all the means of communication were broken in Egypt on 28th January even mobiles; so there was no role for Facebook or twitter for several days...It had an effect and there were preparation before 25th of January but from

28th of January the effect was canceled as all communication means was disconnected in Egypt and this status continued for five or six days.....disconnecting the communication network made people fear about their children in the squares so they went out with them and numbers increased (Respondent 7).

Respondent thirteen also discussed the blackout by suggesting that other factors, especially the severe poverty being experienced by sections of the Egyptian population, sustained the uprising during this period. He stated:

When communication was broken during the revolution, there were not any communications in Facebook and Twitter....all of people went out to the streets because of poverty (Respondent 13).

Respondent Eight also points to the Internet blackout implemented by the Mubarak regime as evidence that the role of social media must have been eliminated at this time. Respondent Eight then goes on to explain how satellite communication was severely limited and that only landline phone lines were left in operation. Ironically, however, Respondent Eight agrees that these media restrictions only served to increase the size of the demonstrations. Again, the reason is associated with the desire to check what was happening with relatives, especially the youth who represented a driving force among the demonstrators. As Respondent Eight explains:

On 25th of January, Facebook and Twitter contributed in those events but on 28th the communications were broken down; so we cannot say that Facebook and Twitter had a role at that time because they did not exist and those who could communicate by satellite were a limited number of people and only the landlines were working. Communications and Internet breakdown contributed in making people go out to the streets to check on their relatives (Respondent 8).

It is interesting to note, therefore, that the role of Facebook and Twitter during the Egyptian uprising may be regarded as being divided into two separate phases. During the earliest phase of the uprising, leading up to and including the first major demonstration on 25th January 2011, such social media played a vital part in helping the activists to plan, organize, and communicate. However, during the next phase when there was a social media blackout, Facebook and Twitter were unavailable for use. Therefore, other factors, such as concern for relatives and poverty, were the causes underlying increased masses of people pouring onto the streets during the time of the Internet blackout.

On the other hand, Respondent Four makes the following point:

Facebook and Twitter played a significant role in the revolutions eruption....the Egyptian authorities, three days after the eruption of the revolution, had to block the Internet and mobile services all over Egypt. Such an act proved that the social networking sites, including Facebook and Twitter, played a significant role in the agitation and persistence of the Arab revolution (Respondent 4).

Therefore, Respondent Four believes that the Internet blackout, which was enforced by the Egyptian authorities, actually proves how important social media was to the success of the uprising. Otherwise, if social media had not been important to the success of the uprising, then the regime would not have taken such drastic measures as cutting off the country's Internet completely.

5.4.2 THEME 2: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

5.4.2.1 Social media persuaded many users to participate in the street protests

This thesis found strong evidence that social media was effective at persuading a significant number of users to participate directly in the street protests of the Egyptian uprising. The idea that Facebook and Twitter activism caused users to switch from online to offline protesting is mentioned by respondents ten and four:

The youth persuaded many people to go out in the streets until 28th when all Egypt was in the streets even me (Respondent 10).

Facebook had a great influence on convincing people of joining the protests. Therefore, it managed to group people to rebel against the regime in power (Respondent 4).

Other interviewees, such as respondent nine, go even further by claiming social media usage even changed some people's opinions - from being against protesting to being in favour:

I was not sure the demonstrations were the right way to do things.....I decided later I must stand with my people after the chats I had (on social media) (Respondent Nine).

Comments such as these show that around half of the respondents thought that Facebook and Twitter was a forum whereby users were able to change the opinions of other users. In particular, it is claimed that users of these social media were being persuaded to join the street protests via these media. Only Respondent Five was unconvinced of social media's ability to change people's opinions. He said:

I think Facebook and Twitter does not change the people's view very much; as each person on Facebook and Twitter has his own previous beliefs and he defended these beliefs on Facebook and Twitter (Respondent 5).

5.4.2.2 Social media spread some confusion and nonsense

The findings of this thesis suggest there was a perception among several respondents that social media was associated with some negativity. In particular, it has been implied that Facebook and Twitter were not functioning as an efficient public sphere because of confused, irrelevant and nonsensical information that was being disseminated. For example, respondents seven and eight commented:

There is a kind of confusion because the information is too much and we do not know the right from the wrong (Respondent 7).

Facebook and Twitter causes deterioration and misleading information and so people are confused by this (Respondent 8).

So these two respondents highlighted confusion and misinformation that was caused by an array of differing arguments and alternative perspectives. In fact, respondent 8 later went on to imply that social media users tend to be confused individuals who use social media indoors and live in a false reality. On this note, respondent eleven made even stronger negative remarks concerning social media. He said:

If we analyze the content, you shall find nonsense or 90% of this is nonsense; so we should not mention Facebook or Twitter in analyzing the content because all of them speak from their bedroom and they say what they want (Respondent 11).

Interviewee eleven believes that most of the content on social media is useless information being exchanged on computers by bedroom activists. Therefore,

although it is true that such negative perceptions of social media activists/users (and the content being disseminated by them) are highlighted by only a minority of respondents, it should be acknowledged that these comments were expressed with real passion and conviction. Thus, they are deemed worthy of inclusion and attention within the themes of the findings.

5.4.2.3 Social media versus the traditional public sphere

In order for an investigation to be conducted regarding the importance of social media (as compared to the traditional public sphere) in starting and/or sustaining the Egyptian uprising, the interviewees were asked for their opinion regarding the role of mosques and coffee shops during the revolution. In response, most of the interviewees claimed these traditional public spheres played a crucial role during the uprising. For instance:

Coffee shops were contributing in that. Mosques have been very important...after the revolution some religious leaders such as the leader of Ibrahim Mosque, and it is a famous mosque, tried to convince people and it became the center of the revolution in Alexandria (Respondent 2).

The people who go to mosques are inclined to be religious.....but the coffee shops are places where the medium and rich classes meet.... the coffee shops and mosques exceeded Facebook and Twitter in pushing the revolution to success (Respondent 12).

These comments suggest that both the mosques and the coffee shops had important roles in generating and sustaining the Egyptian uprising. On the one hand, the mosques were described as being particularly influential in motivating the masses to demonstrate on the streets because of the huge number of Egyptians (from all classes

of society) who regularly attend mosques and who respect the sermons of the Imams. On the other hand, although the coffee shops tended to be frequented by a much smaller section of middle- or upper-class citizens, this could be regarded as an influential group of activists and protesters.

However, although some respondents (such as respondent twelve above) claimed these traditional public spheres were more influential during the Egyptian uprising as compared to social media, a number of respondents said the traditional public spheres were not necessarily alternatives to social media. For example, the point was made that sometimes Imams and religious leaders also used social media as a means of reaching a wider audience:

The imams preached from the pulpit and through Facebook, telling the congregation to rise up in revolt (Respondent 13).

Thus, overall, mosques may have had a more influential role, compared to coffee shops, because the Imams are highly respected in a country such as Egypt. Therefore, not only were Imams able to gain the support of many people, but a number of them were also actively involved in encouraging Egyptians to join the street protests through the mosques and sometimes through social media as well. Furthermore, a more detailed analysis of the interviews revealed evidence that the mosques in Egypt were particularly effective in transmitting revolutionary ideas to members of the congregation. Also, bearing in mind the relatively influential role that Imams have over the opinions and behaviour of people, it therefore appears that certain mosques were especially important in helping to generate and sustain the uprising. For example, respondent thirteen said:

Some places such as Tahrir Square, Sheikh Mazhar and Al Sheikh Al Mahalawi in Alexandria had a big role in gathering people and they were behind them so they were fathers of the revolution. But they were with the Muslim Brotherhood and so some people left him and separated (Respondent 13).

Therefore, it is noted that two imams/sheikhs (Mazhar and Mahalawi) were particularly influential in motivating members of their congregations to physically join the street protests. However, it should be recognized that many mosques, such as those run by Mazhar and Mahalawi, were closely aligned to the Islamist party, the Muslim Brotherhood. This suggests such mosques were generating support for this type of Islamic party, rather than generating support for the more secular social media activists. Respondent four also claimed that the two imams/sheikhs (Mazhar and Mahalawi) were influential in spreading support for the Muslim Brotherhood. He also stated that such mosques gave further support to Salafist groups. Similar to the Muslim Brotherhood, these Salafist Muslims were promoting a political agenda based upon Islam rather than on secularism or democracy. However, Salafist groups, including An Nur party, may be regarded as even more religiously minded than the Muslim Brotherhood. This is because their call was for the full implementation of Sharia Law across Egypt, to create a society based on the way of life of the Salaf (who were the very earliest generations of Muslims from the time of Prophet Muhammad in the 6th century). As respondent four explains:

The terrorist Muslim Brotherhood played a role through the small mosques in the Egyptian villages and towns, through which they used to spread their destructive ideas. No party whatsoever was able to occupy mosques or give sermons in them except Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist groups (Respondent 4).

Similarly, respondent eight also associated certain mosques with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis, although he also believed coffee shops were quite influential as traditional public spheres during the uprising. In addition, respondent three also agreed that mosques tended to assist the Muslim Brotherhood, yet he also thought the same of coffee shops in terms of helping to spread support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis began to control many mosques, and we as an Egyptian people are religious people and this had a great effect.....As for the coffee shops, they are very effective as the coffee shops are not only a place of entertainment and wasting time; as the youth study in the coffee shops, sit and meet to exchange views (Respondent 8).

They (mosques and coffee shops) had no role except with Muslim Brotherhood (Respondent 3).

On the other hand, interviewees such as respondent five did not believe that mosques or coffee shops had any influence on generating the country's uprising. However, he did think they became influential once the uprising got started, which supports the argument that the social media activists initiated the uprising but others (especially the Muslim Brotherhood and An Nur) later took the leading role in sustaining the uprising.

I believe they (mosques and coffee shops) had no role before the Egyptian revolution but after the revolution began they played a great role in directing people either towards being satisfied or dissatisfied with the regime (Respondent 5).

Also there was just one respondent who thought that mosques and coffee shops did not have any role whatsoever in generating or sustaining the Egyptian uprising. This was respondent one who said:

No, not the least role, since the main motivator was the social networking websites, particularly Facebook and Twitter (Respondent 1).

Overall, however, the majority of respondents believed that the mosques (and coffee shops to a lesser degree) did help to initiate and sustain the uprising. It is also interesting that a few respondents described the successful role of Facebook and Twitter during the early phases of the Egyptian uprising as being derived from new technological benefits. For instance,

These electronic hideouts or these pages (social media) were able to start the revolution (Respondent 7).

5.4.3 THEME 3: SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ORGANISATIONAL TOOL FOR ACTIVISM

5.4.3.1 A tool for activism planning and organising

With regard to the possibility that social media were used as tools for organising and building the protest movement during the Egyptian uprising, the interviewees were asked their opinions regarding the use of Facebook and Twitter as communication tools by the protesters. In response, the interviewees made comments that were mostly supportive of the idea that Facebook and Twitter were important communication tools for the protesters. In relation to the activists' use of Facebook and Twitter as communication tools, the following quotations are typical examples of the respondents' opinions:

They (Facebook and Twitter) had a good role in the demonstrations and for arranging dates, moving and marches (Respondent 11).

In Facebook and Twitter the activists were communicating....about upcoming events (Respondent 12).

Thus, most respondents tended to highlight their belief that Facebook and Twitter helped the protesters to plan and organize their activities and demonstrations. Furthermore, in the following comments below, it was explained by respondent five that social media offered the protesters an alternative means of communication to the telephone. Respondent five highlights this importance of social media as follows:

Facebook and Twitter were a method of communication among the youth for defining the dates of certain events at certain times. It was an alternative to the telephone for defining certain times for gathering (Respondent 5).

In addition, the comments of respondent twelve are interesting and relevant because he is a media correspondent who was in Tahir Square at the time of the uprising. During that time, he said Facebook and Twitter played a critical role in allowing protesters to communicate with each other:

Facebook and Twitter had the role of the hero in the revolution....They had a high effect and I, as a media correspondent, the main source of communicating for me was Facebook and Twitter when I was in Tahir Square (Respondent 12).

It is also worth mentioning that respondents eight and eleven explain that Facebook and Twitter were not just being used by secular-minded protesters during the uprising. At the time of writing these findings, the Muslim Brotherhood government of President Morsi had just been overthrown in a coup by General Sisi. Therefore,

with on-going street protests being organized by the supporters of the imprisoned Morsi, these social media tools are now being used by both Morsi supporters and Sisi supporters. Therefore, the importance of Facebook and Twitter as effective communicative tools appears to be increasing within the country.

Even now the Muslim Brotherhood is still organizing their marches by Facebook and Twitter (Respondent 8).

Sisi and his military institutions use it (social media) communication method for their counter-demonstrations (Respondent 11).

5.4.3.2 Organized versus unorganised

Approximately two-thirds of the respondents thought that the activists were organized. Some of the respondents even mentioned the fact there was no clear, overall leader, yet still they believed that the activists were organized in planning and executing their demonstrations. For example, respondents two and thirteen said:

They (social media activists) were organized to a big extent and they have no leader to push them (Respondent 2).

Most (social media activists) are very organized (Respondent 13).

On the other hand, about one third of the respondents thought that the activists were not organized. For example, respondent seven said:

The operation wasn't organized either. It has a kind of randomness (Respondent 7).

Thus, such respondents believed that the demonstrations were mostly random events as people joined the protesters on the streets through word of mouth and curiosity.

Furthermore, respondent thirteen describes how social media descended into a forum of heated arguments between users. This chaotic disunity is discussed as follows:

Facebook and social communication sites turned into terrible fights among the revolutionary youth and they were separated into 130 parties. Every one said “I did the 25th of January revolution” and each one says “I was in the square” as if the square was only for them (Respondent 13).

In other words, interviewee thirteen claims that the social media activists lost their direction as the uprising gathered pace towards the removal of Mubarak from power. Importantly, however, as the prize of political power drew near, the divisions between the activists began to show, and so social media communications descended into heated arguments, insults, and abuse. This was compounded by the fact that the activists held a wide range of differing beliefs from a wide range of different groups, ranging from secularists and democrats on the one hand to political Islamists (including the Muslim Brotherhood) and religious fundamentalists (including the Salafists) on the other hand.

5.4.4 THEME 4: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

5.4.4.1 Social media and youth

With regard to the ages of the Egyptian activists who were using social media during the uprising, there is a broad agreement across the interviewees that they were youthful. Hence, the implication is that the youth were important contributors to the social and political changes that were achieved by the Egyptian uprising, even if such changes were limited or temporary. Also, the fact that the youth were willing to challenge the Egyptian establishment (which for decades had instructed its citizens to

know their place and to obey those in authority) demonstrates a stark change in attitude. Among the comments made by the interviewees are the following relevant statements:

The generation that made the Arab Spring revolution was the youth (Respondent 12).

Youth were the makers of the uprising.....They (the youth) used social media greatly at that time (Respondent 13).

Comments by the interviewees not only mention the fact that most social media activists were youthful, they also discuss their role as being central to generating the uprising. In addition, it was also mentioned that the youth possessed a type of innocent, optimistic outlook, which was mostly not aware of the brutal reality of politics. Respondents, such as respondent 12, explain how the more politically experienced individuals (especially the long-established Muslim Brotherhood party) were able to take the lead from the youth during the uprising.

The youth had great dreams but they did not understand the reality of politics.....the Muslim Brotherhood had the real understanding and succeeded better in the end (Respondent 12).

Hence, despite joining the uprising much later, the Muslim Brotherhood went on to gain power after the elections; the youthful social media activists, however, achieved very little political power, despite having been the main instigators of the uprising. Subsequently, however, the Muslim Brotherhood were themselves deposed from power in a military coup by General Sisi and became banned as a terrorist organization (Hamed, 2014).

5.4.4.2 Social media and women

On the topic of the role of women during the Egyptian uprising, the general opinion of the interviewees is that the women initially became more active in many ways. They were directly active in the planning and organization of protests on social media, often taking a leading role alongside the men, and they were at the forefront of the actual street demonstrations. Later on, however, as the suppressive tactics of President Sisi became increasingly brutal and lethal, women tended to be less involved in social media activism and their involvement in street protests also declined. For instance, interviewees five and fourteen said:

In those early days of the 2011 uprising everybody was coming together..... the women as well. Women wanted to be a part of this movement for change and it was really amazing to see them out in Tahir Square next to the men (Respondent Five).

There were women among the leadership of the April 6th Group and so these women had a crucial part to play in instigating the protests in Egypt. Social media was being used so much by young women, especially the educated ones from the middle classes, and they were hoping to get new rights, equal rights, in a new society. These young women sent messages to each other on social media.....of course violence is harder for women to bear as compared to men and the police knew this and liked to target them. Later the police under Sisi and the army killed hundreds of people, just shooting them dead with deliberate shots to the head. That's when the revolution against Mubarak came to an end under Sisi and most women began to stay away from the violence....fears of arrest and imprisonment and beatings' (Respondent Fourteen).

Therefore interviewees five and fourteen reflect the general opinion of most of the interviewees, which is that the women (especially the young and well-educated women from the middle class) were participating as social media activists. They had high aspirations for more equal treatment in society, and their involvement in activism and in street demonstrations increased because of social media. Yet the severe violence and the slaughtering of many hundreds of protesters eventually had a powerfully negative effect on Egyptian women, causing most of them to opt for safety and no longer participate in any aspect of the uprising. Interviewee nine provides some insight into the changing role of Egyptian women during the country's uprising with the following words:

The women were (initially) involved just as much as the men with their text messaging by phone and their messaging on Facebook.....the revolution continues with the young men and the involvement of the women is much less than before (Respondent Nine).

On the other hand, it should also be noted that two of the interviewees spoke very negatively and harshly regarding the involvement of women during the Egyptian uprising. For instance, interviewee four said:

I don't think they (women) should be doing this (participating in street protests)....this undermines the fabric of our society and goes against our history and traditions...the women were decreed by Allah (God) to be in the home and take care of the home and the children. What are they doing shouting in public and confronting the danger? (Respondent Four).

Comments such as these, made by interviewee four, indicate there remains a proportion of Egyptian society which still believes in maintaining the traditional role

of Muslim women. Although the majority of the Egyptian interviewees seemed supportive of increased women's rights and encouraging more political participation from them, the traditionalists were more concerned with protecting women from the inherent dangers of activism. The implication is that all forms of activism, including social media activism, is not deemed safe and so women should be kept away from this for their own safety.

5.4.4.3 Social media and immoral behavior

Analyzing the interviews as a whole, it was found that certain comments were critical or negative regarding the role of Facebook and Twitter during the Egyptian uprising. For instance, it should be noted that several respondents accused Facebook and Twitter of lowering the standards of moral behaviour within Egyptian society. Respondent one describes how the political debates between social media users often descend into slanging matches where foul and abusive language was used.

Regrettably, debate, which is supposed to take place in a healthy respectable atmosphere, always ends in exchanging bad words, libels and accusations. Users have no defined limits of what ought to be said and what has to be avoided on such social networking sites (Respondent 1)

Respondent four included the April 6th Youth Movement as a group who indulged in immoral behaviour in the social media. He even went so far as to describe the insults that were made as slander, and he believes this gave the country a bad representation in the eyes of the outside world.

Some political activists.....misuse them (social media) to give a bad reflection of their countries. That caused many political movements which were once reliable to unmask their ugly faces, which they proved when they abused their home country for

the sake of a specific party. This was evident later on when slanders were made by the 6th of April Youth Movement (Respondent 4).

In addition to the negative statements made regarding Facebook and Twitter that were discussed in the last section above, several of the interviewees complained about the high levels of insults being exchanged on social media. For example, the following was said:

One of their (social media) disadvantages is exchanging immoral expressions and personal battles in a way that were not there before among the Egyptian people, and in the Arab society in particular. The expressions and battles are so bad and there is no regard to morality (Respondent 2).

Social media is being used with very rude expressions (Respondent 8).

Now Facebook and Twitter has turned into insults (Respondent 9).

These comments have been noted by the researcher because this idea that social media was spreading immorality in Egyptian society was not identified in the literature review. This demonstrates an important advantage that semi-structured interviews have over structured interviews. The flexibility that semi-structured interviews have meant that the researcher was able to explore these new areas of investigation, which would not have been possible if structured interviews had instead been selected. By allowing this flexibility in the interview conversations, it was revealed that social media users were trading terrible insults using language that was at odds with the general character of Egyptian Islamic behaviour.

This leads to the conclusion held by a few interviewees that social media is at odds with Egyptian culture, and so may represent a form of westernization that is deemed undesirable.

5.4.4.4 Overall evaluation of social media and social/political change

When assessing the overall importance of social media during the Egyptian uprising in relation to the social and political outcome, the majority of the interviewees thought social media usage was causing the Egyptian society to become more westernized. Respondent three explained this in the following words:

Of course, even in my home and my children, Facebook and Twitter has influenced about the culture of clothes from outside, food from outside, music from outside. So this means our homes are starting to change because of globalization (Respondent 3).

This comment by respondent three is fairly typical of most of the interviewees, who can see the westernizing effects of social media within their own homes. Their children in particular are moving rapidly away from traditional Egyptian culture towards a more western culture because of the influence of Facebook and Twitter. These changes are said to include all aspects of culture, including clothing, food, and music. On the other hand, respondent four drew attention to other related issues when he said:

Facebook and Twitter played an important role in leading the Egyptian people to political maturity. No one could ever imagine that the Egyptian people could become politically mature in such a short time (Respondent 4).

Therefore, with respect to political change, interviewee four believed social media had a positive influence, such as assisting the population in developing political understanding within a short period of time. Indeed, interviewee four was impressed by the rapid speed of political development in Egypt, which he thought was heavily influenced by social media. Furthermore, a few interviewees drew a distinction between two perceived groups of people within Egyptian society. For instance, interviewee five stated:

Facebook and Twitter..... are used by the open-minded as well as the narrow-minded people. Those who want to lead society to development and those who want to confine it to the dark ages, and we have to learn how to use the technologies to develop society instead of turning it back (Respondent 5).

Thus, a small number of interviewees regarded Egyptians as being either open-minded modernists or closed-minded traditionalists. The challenge thus described is being able to utilize modern technologies whilst also modernizing the society. An important criticism being made by the modernists, such as the secularists, is that Islamists and Islamic traditionalists are holding back the development of society by holding on to beliefs and attitudes that are considered increasingly outdated in the modern world of globalization. As explained by interviewee nine, it is these global communications on social media that are having a huge westernizing effect on Egyptians, especially the youth. He says:

Of course Facebook and Twitter changed the life concept so much in Egypt and also many of the youth on Facebook and Twitter have relationships and friendships that connect all the Arab and foreign people in Facebook and Twitter (Respondent 9).

Interviewee three also discussed the globalization effect of social media, and he further claimed that this had brought wide-ranging changes in many areas because social media users (consisting predominantly of those from the middle class) are keen to bring western concepts into Egyptian society:

The middle class has started to connect with global media and social communication networks, Internet and international societies networks and they want the external global standards applied inside Egypt (Respondent 3).

5.5 CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER FIVE (PART A AND PART B)

In the following chapter (six), the findings of this research will be analysed in detail, including referring the findings back to the literature review as well as the researcher offering his own research contribution. Therefore, since this chapter (five) has only presented the research findings, this chapter conclusion will be limited to summarising the most significant findings. This is only a brief preliminary summary of the key themes to emerge in the research findings because they have not yet been analysed.

The theme of social media as a public sphere generated a range of responses, which suggest social media was an effective public sphere vital in helping to both start and sustain the Tunisian uprising. Furthermore, social media was a public sphere, which was effective at persuading Tunisian users to join the street protests during the Tunisian uprising. On the other hand, although social media was also an effective public sphere which was vital for helping to start the Egyptian uprising, it was not effective in sustaining it. This is because, whereas the traditional public sphere did not help to start or to sustain the Tunisian uprising, the traditional public sphere was

important for sustaining the Egyptian uprising and it became progressively more influential (as compared to social media) as the Egyptian uprising continued.

In terms of social media as a public sphere during the Egyptian uprising, it was also found that the Egyptian authorities were monitoring social media and that the uprising actually increased during the regime's blackout of Facebook and Twitter. Regarding Facebook and Twitter as communicational and organisational tools, this thesis found that Facebook and Twitter were effective communicational/organisational tools for both Tunisian and Egyptian activists and ordinary users.

With respect to the role of Facebook and Twitter in generating social/political change, it was found that a variety of other factors combined with social media in starting and sustaining both the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. In addition, social media activism in Tunisia was associated with users from the Tunisian youth, as well as with increasing Tunisian women's emancipation and the modernising of Tunisian society. Likewise, the Egyptian youth were the main group of social media activists during the Egyptian uprising, while social media increased Egyptian women's emancipation, and social media had a westernising effect on Egyptian society. However, this westernising effect on Egyptian society was associated with uncertain economic benefits for Egypt, as well as negative influences arising from the 'immoral' behaviour of Egyptian social media users.

Finally, it should be noted that the findings generated in this chapter will be analysed in the following chapter (six). This will be carried out by relating each of the themes and sub-themes back to the literature review in order to offer an analytical evaluation of the validity of the different authors' opinions. Also, so as to maintain continuity

between chapters five and six, the themes and sub-themes of chapter five will be re-presented in the same format for analysis in chapter six.

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER SIX

A critical analysis of the answer to this thesis's two research questions will provide a comprehensive account of the role played by Facebook and Twitter in generating social and political change during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Bearing this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to conduct an analytical discussion of the research so that the following research questions can be answered:

Research question one:

To what extent did social media provide Tunisians and Egyptians with an effective public sphere for generating social and political change during the uprisings in these two countries?

Research question two:

How important was social media as an organisational and communications tool for Tunisians and Egyptians during the uprisings in these two countries?

With regards to research question number one, it is re-stated from the literature review that the public sphere is a forum or environment where people can come together in order to discuss and debate issues of public concern (Fraser, 1990; DeLuca and Peeples, 2002). Ideally, these conversations should be open and free in order to hold the government accountable to the wishes of the population (Arendt, 1958; DeLuca and Peeples, 2002). Importantly, however, Habermas (1984; 1991; 2006) claimed that social and political changes could be generated through the public

sphere. His argument was that new media technology produces a new public sphere, and that the increased political and social discussions and debates produced via this new forum will generate social and political changes through the improved public awareness of such issues. Thus, according to Habermas (1984; 1991; 2006), the mechanism for generating social and political change lay in the rational discussion of political issues via the new public sphere.

Hence, research question number one is important because it enables the researcher to examine the effectiveness of social media as an alternative new forum where people could criticise the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes. If such critical discussions did take place on social media, and if such discussions caused users to join the street protests, then this suggests that social media played a positive role as a public sphere. Likewise, research question one also allows the researcher to investigate social media's potential role in sustaining the two uprisings whilst any associated social and political changes that are generated can also be evaluated.

With regard to research question number two, it is re-stated from the literature review that social media has been described as offering activists an effective communicational/organisational tool (Shirky, 2011; Barassi and Trere, 2012; Castells, 2012; Lynch, 2015). In particular, social media is claimed to help political activists to plan and organise their activities, to communicate with each other on the street, and to improve the efficiency of political activism (Shirky, 2011; Barassi and Trere, 2012; Castells, 2012; Lynch, 2015). By contrast, sceptics have argued that social media activism tends to fail (Noam, 2005; Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011; Fuchs, 2014) and social media is not an effective communicational/organisational tool since social media activists are poorly organised and ~~they~~ have no hierarchy or

leadership structure (Gladwell, 2010). Therefore, although research question one directs the main focus of this thesis, research question two is important because it helps the researcher to understand the role of social media as a communicative/organisational tool for the opposition activists.

With regard to the analytical steps that were carried out by the researcher, it is recalled (from the Methodology Chapter and the Findings Chapter) that the researcher explained how he used thematic analysis to establish four main themes. Through repetitive stages of coding and coding refinement, these four main themes were specifically designed to enable the researcher to answer the two research questions. Hence the following main themes and sub-themes were established in the Findings Chapter. Main theme One, 'Role of social media during the Tunisian/Egyptian Uprising' contains general sub-themes that were created in order to answer both research questions. Main theme Two, 'Social media as a public sphere' and main theme Four, 'Role of social media in social and political change' contain sub-themes that were created to answer research question number one. Lastly, main theme Three, 'Social media as an organisational tool for activism,' contains sub-themes that were created to answer research question number two.

6.1 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE DURING THE TUNISIAN UPRISING

In order for the researcher to present an analytical discussion of the role of social media as a public sphere during the Tunisian uprising, it is recalled that research question number one is:

1) To what extent did social media provide Tunisians and Egyptians with an effective public sphere for generating social and political change during the uprisings in these two countries?

6.1.1 Social media users were encouraged to help start and sustain the Tunisian Uprising by switching from online to offline activism

Analysing the role of Facebook and Twitter as a public sphere for generating social and political change during the Tunisian uprising, it will be recalled that this research found social media to be an effective public sphere, which was vital in helping to start and sustain the Tunisian uprising. However, the presence of extensive monitoring and censoring by the Ben Ali regime implies that social media was not a totally open public sphere at that time. Therefore, the theoretical ideal of a public sphere, where unhindered communication takes place (Habermas, 1984; 1991), cannot be said to fully apply to social media during the Tunisian uprising. Rather, it should be acknowledged that external influences prevent social media from being an open, free forum where truly genuine political discussions can take place (Habermas, 2006).

In identifying these external influences which prevent social media from being an open public sphere, the findings of this research accept the claims made by Fuchs (2014) who stated that social media are likely to be vulnerable to regime manipulation, censoring, monitoring and propaganda. Thus, the arguments of writers such as Dahlgren (2005) also appear valid since he too highlighted these types of limitations imposed on social media by authoritarian regimes. Yet, although Dahlgren accepted that social media should not be described as an ideal public sphere of complete freedom and openness, he still suggested that social media

represents a public sphere for limited discussions of authoritarian regimes (Dahlgren, 2005). Interestingly, these last thoughts of Dahlgren (2005) seem especially credible since most of the interviewees also regarded social media as a public sphere. Yet this is despite certain issues limiting the freedom of social media usage, such as regime censoring and monitoring.

Thus, the findings of this research support the argument that social media allowed a diverse range of counter-discourse to exist despite it not being a fully functioning open public sphere (Dahlberg, 2007). Nonetheless the interviewees did perceive Facebook and Twitter as a public sphere (that was crucial in helping to start and sustain the Tunisian uprising) because social media was vital for publicising the uprising and for encouraging participation in it. It appears that Tunisians already held the view that the Ben Ali regime should be removed from power, and so social media just gave them that extra encouragement to bring this about, rather than their having to be persuaded to switch from a pro-regime stance to an anti-regime stance.

In particular, the images of Bouazizi burning that were uploaded onto Facebook and then widely disseminated by Al Jazeera, was critical in starting the Tunisian uprising by generating the initial crowds of angry street protesters. Thus, authors such as Salanova (2012), Srinivasana (2014) and Lynch (2015) were correct to state that the interconnectivity between various media should be recognised, thereby implying that different social media do not exist in isolation from other types of media. Similarly, the different uses of social media should also be borne in mind. For instance, whilst Facebook was used mostly for keeping users updated with regular news of the uprising and for distributing images and for encouraging participation, Twitter was used mainly as a communicational tool for street protesters. Back in 2011, Facebook

was far more popular than Twitter and so this was reflected in its greater influence during the Tunisian uprising.

Furthermore, the data reveal a strong concurrence with the views of Papacharissi (2009) who proposed that social media could increase the size of street protests because online social media activism could be developed into offline street activism. In fact Papacharissi (2009) correctly regards social media as a forum where dialogue and debates can encourage users to participate in offline demonstrations. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to conclude that her views on the private sphere may also be true. In particular, she argued that social media activism may be regarded as possessing a private sphere that is primarily associated with personal inner-reflections, and it is these personal inner-reflections (following social media discussions with other users) that will persuade many to join the street demonstrations (Papacharissi, 2009). The belief that social media represents a public sphere where users can be encouraged to join offline demonstrations further conforms to the arguments of Shirky (2011).

Singh and Thakur (2013) also appear to have been correct in stating that social media provided marginalised groups (such as the Tunisian and Egyptian activists) with a public sphere to communicate their ideas away from the regime-controlled mainstream media. In the same way the comments of DeLong-Bas (2016) are in agreement with the findings of this research, since he concluded that social media was an effective public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Likewise, Salanova (2012) made statements that also seem especially relevant to my findings because, in accordance with the theory of the public sphere, social media was described as a forum where Tunisians and Egyptians communicated, held political

discussions and encouraged many other users to join the street protests of the countries' uprisings (Salanova, 2012).

The views of Fuchs (2013), however, are not supported by the findings of this research. Fuchs (ibid) was indeed critical of writers such as Lotan et al (2011) by claiming that there was no clear indication of whether or not Twitter was successful at mobilising users to participate in the street protests. Hence the findings of this thesis challenge these arguments of Fuchs (2013) because most participants believed social media was indeed effective at encouraging users to join the street protests. Similarly, the concept of Gladwell (2010; 2011) describing social media users as weak ties who will not transfer their activities from online to offline activism has also been challenged by this thesis's findings. This study also found that the traditional public sphere did not help to start or to sustain the Tunisian uprising, thereby challenging the claim of Dajani (2011) that the traditional public sphere is more influential than social media within the Arabic context. Instead, my research findings imply that Facebook and Twitter were more influential and also more effective in both starting and sustaining the Tunisian uprising compared to the traditional public sphere.

6.1.2 Brave users ignored censoring and monitoring

In further analysing the role of social media (in terms of its providing the Tunisians with an effective public sphere for generating social and political change during the uprising), the findings of this research suggest conclusions that are not particularly straightforward. On the one hand, some of the criticisms made concerning social media appear to hold true. For example, Gladwell (2010, 2011) and Morozov (2011) drew attention to the censoring and monitoring of social media communication by a

regime as having a severely hindering effect on social media's potential to generate social or political change. Furthermore, this censoring and monitoring is claimed to be especially disruptive to activism if a regime backs this up with harsh punishments in the form of arrests, beatings, torture, and possibly murder (Gladwell 2010, 2011; Morozov, 2011). Therefore, given that the literature review has demonstrated that the Ben Ali regime employed such tactics, the arguments of writers such as Gladwell (2010, 2011) and Morozov (2011) appear to have an initial degree of validity.

Given the fact that social media was tightly controlled by the Ben Ali regime and also that citizens were too afraid to openly criticise the political status quo, there seems to be a contradiction in the research findings. This is because this research has found strong evidence that social media acted as an effective public sphere during the uprising of 2010 - 2011. The findings reveal that Facebook and Twitter were being used by an ever-increasing number of Tunisians to openly discuss news of events related to the uprising and to criticise the regime. This is, of course, contradicts the conclusions of writers such as Gladwell (2010, 2011) and Morozov (2011) who had logically reasoned that the regime's censorship, monitoring and severe penalties would continue to act as an effective deterrence against free speech in Tunisia. Hence, when seeking to analyse the Tunisian uprising and this apparent contradiction, it is essential to bear in mind that this was the first uprising of the so-called 'Arab Spring,' with numerous other countries following suit thereafter.

As Tunisia was the first Arab country to undergo an 'Arab Spring' uprising, social media users were in a unique position to successfully contribute towards regime change, along with the supporting assistance of other factors. Among these other contributory factors was the catalyst that ignited the Tunisian uprising, which was the

death of Bouazizi. This event proved to be so traumatic for the Tunisian people to bear that it contributed hugely towards creating the anger and determination necessary to bring the masses of people out onto the streets in support of the uprising. Therefore, this research found strong evidence that social media became an effective public sphere where people were now prepared to discuss Bouazizi's suicide, criticise the regime, and then be persuaded to join the protests. Despite the known threat of arrest and detention by the security forces, so many Tunisians were using social media in this way that the authorities appear to have been surprised and uncertain as how to react to such a huge response. They seemed unwilling or unable to arrest and imprison so many thousands of regime critics venting their anger on social media.

The findings of this research highlight the courage of the Tunisian people in driving the uprising to a point where it succeeded in removing Ben Ali from power. The images of Bouazizi's burning body on Facebook was the essential first step towards that success, with Al Jazeera TV recycling those Facebook images to the masses of the general population, thereby increasing awareness of and support for the uprising. In other words, the social media users (mostly educated male and female youths from the middle classes), who had generated the uprising after the death of Bouazizi, were later supported on the streets by ordinary citizens from the general population. The courage of the people and the rapid speed at which the protests developed into huge demonstrations has been highlighted by the participants in this research, and the regime appears to have been slow and confused in responding to this surprising event. Ben Ali had clamped down hard to prevent social media from becoming an open public sphere for political dissent, yet this is exactly what it had become.

However, it should also be noted that it is only when the military sided with the people, and refused to slaughter them in the streets, that Ben Ali gave up and fled the country. Therefore, it can be concluded that the military played a crucial role in the rapid success of the uprising, and without such military support, the uprising would likely have failed or developed into a campaign of extended violence.

6.1.3 Social media helped users to generate some social/political change

Overall, data from the interviews offer support to Shirky's (2011) idea that social media represents a public sphere which can generate some social and political change. This is because social media was a forum which brave Tunisians used to criticise the regime and to encourage others to join the street protests. This then led to the removal of Ben Ali from power, the introduction of fair elections, and greatly increased political participation from women. Similarly, the data also provide limited support for Habermas (1984) with regard to the potential for a new public sphere to help generate social and political change. However, this support is limited because of Tunisia's uniqueness in being the first country to undergo an uprising during the Arab Spring. It is not certain that a Tunisian uprising would have succeeded if, for example, Tunisia had been the fourth or fifth Arab country to experience an uprising. In such a scenario, Ben Ali could have learnt some lessons from the first few uprisings by establishing military support and crushing the street protests with deadly violence.

In addition, as confirmed by the detailed study of the Dubai School of Government (2011), social media activism was associated with activists coming primarily from the middle classes and educated youth. Therefore, since Tunisia is a country with a cultural tradition of youth displaying strong respect for their elders, social media

activism may be regarded as challenging the social and political status quo in this respect. During the Tunisian uprising, the youth were no longer willing to accept endless years of authoritarianism and high unemployment, as their predecessors had, and so they were prepared to lead a dangerous, confrontational uprising in order to bring this kind of suffering to an end.

Social media activism and its general usage during the Tunisian uprising also increased women's emancipation. Young women were active participants, as well as leaders, in organising, planning and participating directly in the street demonstrations, thereby breaking with their cultural and traditional role of remaining at home whilst the men alone took on such responsibilities. Social media activism also allowed significant numbers of women to become involved in politics, with unprecedented numbers being elected into the Tunisian Parliament from the post-Ben Ali elections (Mourtada and Salem, 2012). Thus, most of the interviewees perceived social media as being influential in modernising Tunisian society as the country moved further towards democracy and secularism. However, although this research did find evidence that Tunisians were becoming increasingly westernised, it appears this process of westernisation was voluntary and had been ongoing for a number of decades. Therefore, social media seems to be reinforcing this voluntary process within Tunisia.

This conclusion, which is drawn from analysing the findings (that many Tunisians, especially the young social media users, were willingly and voluntarily seeking to adopt Western social/political values), challenges the electronic colonialism of McPhail (2006; 2008). He claimed that media users in developing countries, such as Tunisia, were being unwittingly westernised by the developed countries' deliberate

manipulation of new media technology (McPhail 2006; 2008). However, this researcher has found credibility in the theory of technical and cultural appropriation, where it is argued that the developing country will actively obtain new technology and new cultural influences from another nation whilst also controlling its acquisition and its cultural effects (Berker et al, 2006; Flew and Cunningham, 2010; Lindtner et al, 2012).

Likewise the social and political developments (that were generated by the Tunisian uprising) appear to include an ongoing struggle between supporters of westernisation, secularism and democracy, on the one hand, versus some Islamists and cultural traditionalists on the other. With the country's government attempting to achieve a balance between these two extremes by implementing a type of democratic Islamic agenda, Rogers's (2006) concept of 'transculturation' is valid. This is because transculturation states that the recipient nation's willing acquisition of the dominant nation's technology and culture means it will develop into a new form of hybrid society. Such a society will evolve from its own voluntary combination of the different technological, cultural, religious and social elements emanating from different nations (Rogers, 2006).

In addition, this thesis also confirms the arguments of Simonetti (2011) who claimed that social media is an important contributory force behind social/political developments related to the youth and to women. Similarly, Mourtada and Salem (2012) appear to have some validity in their enthusiasm for the societal and political transformations they perceive are occurring from social media. It is true that the youth and women were able to effectively utilise social media during the Tunisian uprising, to bring a new perception of women within Tunisian society. They were

also prepared to do this despite the danger of beatings, torture, and possible death whilst imprisoned by the regime (Mourtada and Salem, 2012). However, in the section ‘The situation today’ within the conclusion to this thesis, it will be shown that the effectiveness of social media activism in Tunisia began to wane shortly after the removal of Ben Ali from power.

In the following section, the researcher will offer an analytical discussion of the role of social media as a communicational/organisational tool during the Tunisian uprising. However, since the use of social media as a communicative/organisational tool can also be associated with helping to generate social and political changes in the country, it is mentioned here briefly as well. These changes include those related to the removal of Ben Ali from power, the introduction of democratic elections and the new roles for the youth and women. Hence, social media may be regarded as assisting in the generation of such social/political changes both as a public sphere and as a communicative/organisational tool.

In addition, the data suggest that a variety of other factors (such as authoritarianism, corruption, high unemployment and poverty) combined with social media in order to start and sustain the Tunisian uprising. Thus, this offers support for the soft view theory of technological determinism, where new media technology is said to combine with various other factors in order to generate social and political changes (Smith and Marx, 1994). However, within the conclusion sub-section of ‘The situation today’, it will be shown that the limited social and political changes generated through social media activism do not tend to hold in the medium in the long run. Therefore, whilst Gladwell (2010; 2011) seems to be misguided in stating that online social media activism will not evolve into offline activism, his claim that

the lack of a hierarchy will eventually cause social media activism to descend into failure does appear credible.

6.2 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ORGANISATIONAL AND COMMUNICATIONAL TOOL DURING THE TUNISIAN UPRISING

In order for the researcher to present an analytical discussion of the role of social media as an organisational/communicational tool during the Tunisian uprising, it is recalled that research question number two is:

2) How important was social media as an organisational and communications tool for Tunisians and Egyptians during the uprisings in these two countries?

6.2.1 Facebook and Twitter were effective communicational/organisational tools for activists as well as for ordinary users

In attempting to answer this research question, the researcher found strong evidence that social media was a vital organisational and communications tool for Tunisians during the uprising. It had a critical role in enabling users, especially the political activists, to plan and organise their activities. Messages were passed on social media whereby users informed each other of upcoming events and protests, including the times and places of street demonstrations. Thus, social media can play an important role in helping activists to raise awareness of their calls for freedom and democracy. This suggests there is validity in the opinions of those who propose social media is a tool allowing activists to spread their messages, images and videos both nationally and internationally, as well as being used both online and offline as a means to assist in the planning and organising of protests (Dahlgren 2000, 2005; Benkler, 2006;

Dahlberg, 2007; Ghannam, 2011; Petersen, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Salanova, 2012; Singh and Thakur, 2013; DeLong-Bas, 2016).

In addition, the evidence from this research is also in part-conformance with the claims of Castells (2012). On the one hand, his argument that social media is an effective communications tool has some validity in relation to Tunisia. This is because he believes Facebook and Twitter formed an essential catalyst for the uprising in Tunisia, and so he argues they represented a precondition for the uprisings to occur. However, on the other hand, Castells (2012) may be described as a hard view technological determinist because he suggests that social media is entirely responsible for generating such uprisings (and bringing social and political change) without any detailed references to other factors that might be contributing to these uprisings. Therefore, since Castells (2012) does not attach significance to these other factors (including authoritarianism, corruption, poverty and the lack of human rights) this means that this thesis's findings tend to challenge his apparent hard view technological determinist position. As explained in the previous sub-section of 'Social media helped users to generate some social/political change', the data proposes that these additional factors did contribute to starting and sustaining the Tunisian uprising. Thus, soft view technological determinism (Smith and Marx, 1994) offers the more accurate theory for understanding how the new technology of social media (in combination with other factors) generated certain social and political changes.

6.3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE DURING THE EGYPTIAN UPRISING

In order for the researcher to present an analytical discussion of the role of social media as a public sphere during the Egyptian uprising, it is recalled that research question number one is:

1) To what extent did social media provide Tunisians and Egyptians with an effective public sphere for generating social and political change during the uprisings in these two countries?

6.3.1 Social media was perceived as an open public sphere where users could be persuaded to join the street protests

The findings imply that social media was an effective public sphere for helping to start the Egyptian uprising, as well as for generating social and political change. Although the literature review indicated there was some monitoring of social media during the time of the Mubarak era, this research found strong evidence that social media communication was regarded as relatively open in Egypt during the period leading up to the 2011 uprising. Therefore, whilst detentions of certain social media users may have occurred due to anti-regime comments they might have made on social media, this research found that Facebook and Twitter were mostly perceived as open public spheres. Also, since most respondents believed social media represented a public sphere where social and political discussions took place, these opinions support the literature of writers who are positive about the role of social media during the uprising (Dahlgren 2000, 2005; Benkler, 2006; Dahlberg, 2007; Ghannam, 2011; Petersen, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Castells, 2012; Salanova, 2012; Singh and Thakur, 2013; DeLong-Bas, 2016).

In addition, this research found strong evidence that social media represented a public sphere where Egyptians were persuaded to join the street protests. Similarly, it also found that social media users could be persuaded to change their opinions, regarding issues related to opposing the regime and participating in action in the hope of bringing about social and political reform. Thus, the respondents' perceptions tend to affirm the idea that conversations via the new public sphere (offered by new media technology) can persuade people to participate in street protests, which then lead to the generation of social/political change (Habermas 1984; Papacharissi 2009; Shirky 2011). The findings of this thesis also offer some confirmation of other perspectives, including those of Salanova (2012), Singh and Thakur (2013) and DeLong-Bas (2016), who proposed that social media was an effective public sphere during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings.

On the other hand, due to the Mubarak regime's monitoring of social media, Facebook and Twitter cannot be described as a fully functional, open public sphere as theorised by Habermas (1984), thereby suggesting support for the claims of writers such as Dahlgren (2000; 2005) and Dahlberg (2007) who described social media as a public sphere that is not entirely open. In fact, most of the participants in this research also indicated that the freedom to use social media as an open public sphere had virtually disappeared by 2015. President Sisi's government had by then introduced strict censoring and monitoring across all parts of the media, including social media, as well as passing new laws that severely restricted free expression and outlawed the gathering of people for demonstrations. Furthermore, these are now being strictly enforced with police detainments and the imposition of lengthy prison sentences for those found guilty of breaking these laws.

Those currently serving lengthy prison sentences are thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members (including their entire leadership) as well secular activists who were campaigning for a modern, western-style democracy for Egypt. For example, members of the April 6th movement (such as the leader Ahmed Maher and other leading members of the group) have been gaoled for many years. Hence, the successful establishment of democracy may require a maturing period of time, which may turn out to be longer and more sustained than that offered by the brief rapidity of social media activism (Hassan, 2011). This appears especially true, bearing in mind that social media was often perceived as spreading confusion and nonsense. In particular, unqualified and inexperienced users were guilty of disseminating misinformation that actually hindered progress towards unity and reform.

6.3.2 Social media helped to start the Egyptian Uprising but the traditional public sphere was far more influential in sustaining the Uprising after the Internet blackout

An analysis of the data suggests that the role of social media during the Egyptian uprising was not a simple case of its being either positive or negative (both as a public sphere and as an organisational tool). Rather, it seems that Facebook and Twitter were particularly important during the earliest days of the Egyptian uprising but that their influence diminished after the Internet blackout shut down social media. Hence, it is likely that the Internet blackout contributed towards the increased influence of the traditional public sphere's face-to-face communication since social media was not available during the blackout. The traditional public sphere (which had helped to start the Egyptian uprising alongside social media) now became the most dominant means of sustaining street protests. Indeed, even after the Internet and

social media were restored to the people, the traditional public sphere continued to be most effective in generating mass demonstrations.

In analysing the overall significance of social media's role as a public sphere during the Egyptian uprising, the findings suggests this was somewhere between highly influential on the one hand (during the initial stages of the protests) and of low influence on the other hand (during the mid- and latter stages of the protests). Therefore, during the earliest phase of the Egyptian uprising, the claims of social media supporters appear to have some validity (Castells 2011; Shirky 2011). Yet, during the later phase, the arguments of social media opponents are more credible (Gladwell 2011, Morozov 2011). In particular, this second phase is in accordance with authors such as Dajani (2011) who emphasise the importance of face-to-face communication within the traditional public sphere over that of social media's digital communication.

The researcher is thus able to offer a contribution appertaining to the Egyptian uprising by suggesting that it should be analysed as having two distinct stages, where neither social media supporters nor opponents are entirely correct. Instead, the Egyptian uprising should be understood from a more flexible perspective, which could be described as a middle way between the two extremes. Of course, it is recognised that writers such as Gerbaudo (2012) also proposed that the role of social media could be analysed from a middle way perspective. Yet none of these writers broke the Egyptian uprising down into the two separate phases as the researcher has done with this data. On the other hand, it is also noted that Juris (2012) has arrived at similar conclusions to this research. Although Juris (2012) was investigating the 'Occupy' sit-in movements (of Europe and the US during 2011), he found that social

media was most important for activists during the initial phases of discussions and communicating/organising. However, face-to-face communication became more important the longer the sit-ins continued (Juris, 2012).

6.3.3 Other factors helped to start and sustain the Egyptian Uprising

The data further show that there were a range of underlying factors that were contributory causes to the Egyptian uprising. From among these causes, the most often cited were corruption, police oppression, and poverty. Although other causes, such as the desire for democracy, human rights, and employment were also highlighted by the participants to this research, these additional issues were not regarded as the main factors underlying the uprising. Therefore, given the stark differences between the protesters, with educated, middle-class youth on the one hand and uneducated, poverty-stricken citizens on the other, it appears that these differences were reflected in the motivations and the demands of the various protesters. Whilst the educated, middle class youth were utilising social media to call for the higher values of democracy and human rights, masses of poor Egyptians were joining the uprising because they simply needed bread in order to live. Indeed, the protesters' slogan of 'Bread and freedom' seems to reflect the underlying causes of the Egyptian uprising, which were most commonly identified in this research as corruption, police oppression, and poverty.

Thus, most of the protesters were frustrated by state corruption (as symbolised by President Mubarak's regime and as also reflected in the later calls for his resignation), police oppression (especially the lack of freedom under the brutal reign of Interior Minister Al Adly and the immediate calls for his resignation), and poverty (in particular, the need for basic food stuffs). These most commonly cited

causes of the uprising also strengthen the idea that, after the initial generation of the protests by social media activists, the masses of poor Egyptians became the dominant force of the uprising. With their numerical advantage over the social media activists, these huge crowds of poor people were desperate and determined enough to remain on the streets in order to withstand the violent backlash from the security forces. Of course, the social media activists (including women) played a crucial part in the street protests, yet it was mostly the poor who continued (and still continue) to be the driving force of these demonstrations.

6.3.4 Social and political change: Women and youth

Many of the respondents believed that social media was especially influential in helping women to take on more active roles within the opposition movement. Hence, the findings offer a degree of support for social media's emancipatory effects since there is evidence that women were directly involved in the activism of the 2011 uprising. This involvement included important leadership roles, with women actively participating in the planning and organising of activities. Their involvement also included direct participation in the street protests where they experienced the same threats and dangers as their male counterparts. Hence, given the conservative nature of Egyptian society (especially among the majority Muslim population) this is quite remarkable since it breaks with the traditional role of a woman as a housewife and mother who does not become involved in demonstrations. Yet it is noted that this research also found some evidence of dissatisfaction among some research participants regarding female activists. Therefore, although it can be argued that social media has played an important part in 'liberating' women from their traditional roles, it is also recognised that such social change has not been extensive.

There still exists a strong core of Egyptian society that opposes female activism, preferring women to remain within their traditional role.

Another important social and political change that was inspired by social media relates to the role of the youth within Egypt. Importantly, as discussed in literature such as the study of the Dubai School of Government (2011), this thesis found that most of the social media activists were from the youth. For several decades, the youth accepted their loyal and subservient role of not challenging the decisions of their elders and their political leaders, yet the Egyptian uprising was generated primarily by the youth (both male and female) who were now utilising social media to demand an end to the status quo. They were no longer willing to accept a life of never-ending corruption and authoritarianism, and social media was the influential and critical tool which helped them to achieve the resignation of Mubarak. Therefore these research findings offer some support for writers such as Simonetti (2011) and Mourtada and Salem (2012). This is because Simonetti (2011) highlighted the potential for social media to act as a generator of social and political change for both women and youth. Likewise, Mourtada and Salem (2012) explained how women and the youth were willing to confront the danger of violence and possibly death at the hands of the security forces. As a result, with the successful use of social media, they did this and so brought about some societal and political changes (Mourtada and Salem, 2012).

6.3.5 Social and political change: Increased abusive and immoral behaviour

Evidence from the interviews suggests that many Egyptians were dissatisfied with the behaviour of social media users. Indeed, the interaction of social media users (as they debated over political issues) was often regarded as offensive behaviour that

were contrary to the Egyptians' Islamic and cultural values of respect and good manners. Thus, the researcher is able to offer another contribution to literature by highlighting the increased abusive and immoral behaviour that was associated with Egyptians' social media activism. This research found that huge amounts of insults and personal abuse were being traded between social media users, and that this divisive conflict continued on national TV and radio. Therefore, the disorganisation and the lack of a clear, overall leadership structure was evident and became problematic for the opposition movement, which is in accordance with Gladwell (2010; 2011) and his criticism of social media activism. The data also suggest that the abusive arguments between the young social media activists had a negative influence on the perceptions of Egypt's general public. The overwhelming majority of Egyptians did not use social media, but they did watch TV and the research findings suggest that their viewing of young activists abusing each other on TV in this way probably lost them much credibility and support. Hence, this was a contributory factor to the defeat of the activist youth at the elections, which saw the Muslim Brotherhood voted into power with Morsi as president.

6.4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATIONAL/ORGANISATIONAL TOOL DURING THE EGYPTIAN UPRISING

In order for the researcher to present an analytical discussion of the role of social media as a communicational/organisational tool during the Egyptian uprising, it is recalled that research question number two is:

How important was social media as an organisational and communications tool for Tunisians and Egyptians during the uprisings in these two countries?

6.4.1 Facebook and Twitter were effective communicational/organisational tools for activists as well as for ordinary users

In answering research question two, this thesis found that Facebook and Twitter were effective communicational/organisational tools for activists as well as for ordinary users. In other words, the role of social media was critical in helping the activists to successfully communicate information between themselves, to others nationally and to others internationally. The result is that social media was vital in assisting the activists to organise and plan their activities, and social media was also important in allowing activists and normal users to spread their revolutionary comments to others both within and outside Tunisia. Through these capabilities for improved communication and planning, the interviewees of this research came to perceive that the activists were more organized rather than unorganized. Yet, whilst individual Egyptian activist groups such as the April 6th Movement were effective at utilising social media for organisational and communicational purposes, the co-ordination between different groups and ordinary users was often poor and disorganised. This implies that the claims of Gladwell (2011) (that social media activism tends to fail due to the lack of hierarchy and organisation) applies to ordinary users within the Egyptian context.

Finally, attention is drawn to the above sub-section ‘Social media helped to start the Egyptian Uprising but the traditional public sphere was far more influential in sustaining the Uprising after the Internet blackout.’ In particular, the researcher’s contribution which was offered in that sub-section may also be applied to social media’s role as an organisational/communicational tool. That is, social media was especially useful during the earliest period of the demonstrations as a tool for helping the activists to plan, organise and communicate with each other whilst on the streets.

However its influence declined significantly as the traditional public sphere and face-to-face communication became more effective at sustaining the Egyptian uprising from the time of the blackout. Therefore, within the context of the Egyptian uprising in the short run, the researcher proposes that the arguments of social media supporters appear credible (Root, 2012; Salanova, 2012; Singh and Thakur, 2013; DeLong-Bas, 2016). Yet, in the medium to longer term, arguments in favour of the traditional public sphere and face-to-face communication seem more valid (Dajani, 2011; Juris, 2011).

6.4.2 Some social media activists were highly organised but others were disorganised

The respondents explained that the social media activists who were the initial driving force of the Egyptian uprising were mainly the youth from middle-class families. These youth tended to be well educated, but they were often frustrated because they were unable to find employment despite their qualifications, and it is youth such as these who formed opposition groups including the April 6th Movement. The April 6th Movement was especially well-organised with its members being proficient users of social media, and its political agenda included a call for true democracy (following the rigged elections of the Mubarak era) as well as for the implementation of human rights and an end to corruption. Therefore, the organisation, commitment, and professionalism of the April 6th Movement (especially with respect to its leaders) were identified in the findings of this research. This means that the data refute the claim of Gladwell (2010; 2011) who argued that social media activists tend to be unorganised without a hierarchy or clear leadership structure.

In fact, the findings of this research suggest that all social media users cannot simply be grouped together as suggested by Gladwell (2010; 2011). Instead, the researcher used the research findings to recommend that social media activists should be divided into either organised political groups (such as the April 6th Movement) on the one hand, or ordinary social media users from the general public on the other hand. This division implies that political groups could utilise social media effectively, whilst also maintaining their organisation and leadership; yet it is the ordinary members of the general public who are more likely to suffer from the disorganisation and lack of clear leadership described by Gladwell (2010; 2011).

6.5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TUNISIA AND EGYPT

The data from the interviews suggest that social media was an effective public sphere which was vital in helping to start both the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Social media was not a perfectly functioning public sphere as ideally theorised by Habermas (1984), nonetheless (since Facebook and Twitter were important contributors to the generation of the uprisings in these two countries) this thesis offers support for those authors who argue that social media has the potential to act as an effective public sphere for activism. This is because social media enabled marginalised groups (such as the Tunisian and Egyptian activists) to communicate their ideas and challenge the status quo (Dahlgren 2000, 2005; Dahlberg, 2007; Shirky, 2011; Salanova, 2012; Singh and Thakur, 2013; DeLong-Bas, 2016). Social media produced a global public sphere, as described by Benkler (2006) and Petersen (2011), where Tunisians and Egyptians became linked to individuals and communities both at home and abroad. Also there is credibility in the idea that social media generated significant increases in the freedom of Arab expression (Ghannam,

2011) and that Facebook represented a public sphere during the uprisings because of the detailed arguments that took place there (Root, 2012).

On the other hand, the criticisms of the sceptics Roberts and Crossley (2004) appear correct when they adjudged Habermas's (1984; 1991) contention that participants in the public sphere came from the bourgeoisie, as inappropriate for the modern age of social media. However, it is interesting to note that social media activists in Tunisia and Egypt did come overwhelmingly from the middle-class youth. Therefore, the influential group of bourgeois (middle class) public sphere users identified by Habermas (1984; 1991) could be compared to the influential small group of young (middle class) social media users who were active during the uprisings. The digital divide, which Van Dijk (2012) said is likely to exist across areas such as access and digital skills, probably played an important role in this regard. At the time of the uprisings, from late 2010 until early 2011, access to social media was primarily made by middle class youth because (unlike the overwhelming majority of the populations in Tunisia and Egypt) they had Internet connections at home and the digital skills to use it.

Social media was also important in sustaining the Tunisian uprising up to the removal of Ben Ali, thereby offering further support to the claims of social media enthusiasts such as Aboubaka (2013), Lim (2013) and Alahmed (2014). However, since the effectiveness of social media as a public sphere for activism in Tunisia had begun to wane significantly by the time of the elections (a few months after the deposing of Ben Ali), the suggestion is that social media is not an effective public sphere for political activism in the long run. This waning of social media's influence also appears to have been confirmed by the experiences of the Egyptian uprising,

where social media's initial significance declined even more rapidly. Although social media was vital in helping to generate the Egyptian street protests, within just a few days it had already become less effective as the traditional public sphere (in the form of mosques, which were especially effective during the compulsory Friday 'Juma' congregation prayers) took on the most significant role in sustaining the Egyptian protests. This thesis's finding that social media's influence waned over the medium to long run implies social media supporters are too optimistic in their enthusiasm for social media. Rather, there seems to be some validity in the ideas of Dujani (2011) and Juris (2011) who argued that face-to-face communication is most important for sustaining street demonstrations. This suggests that face-to-face communication has a vital role in mobilising masses of protesters onto the streets and that our understanding of social media's role during the uprisings should be based on a middle way between social media optimism and scepticism (Gerbaudo, 2012).

On the other hand, the success of social media, as a public sphere where many Tunisian users (through encouragement) and many Egyptian users (through persuasion) joined the street protests, suggests a degree of support for the idea that Facebook and Twitter can be utilised to generate offline activism from online activism (Papacharissi, 2009; Shirky, 2011; Lim, 2013). Furthermore, since social media (as a public sphere during both the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings) were being monitored by the authorities, it appears that writers such as Morozov (2011) and Fuchs (2013) underestimated the courage and determination of social media activists. The claim that regime monitoring of social media will act as a strong deterrent to social media activism (Morozov, 2011; Fuchs, 2013) was found to be inaccurate during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. For instance, the commitment of the Egyptians to overthrowing Mubarak is illustrated by the fact that

the uprising was not defeated by the regime's blackout of Facebook and Twitter. In fact, the size and intensity of the street demonstrations actually increased during the period of the blackout.

Since it was found that social media were also effective communicational/organisational tools for activists and ordinary users during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, this thesis confirms the arguments of authors such as Shirky (2011), Barassi and Trere (2012), Castells (2012) and Lynch (2015) who explained that social media enables activists to communicate, plan and organise their activities. The manner in which citizen journalism combined effectively with satellite TV, especially Al Jazeera, highlights the interconnections between the different forms of media as identified by Srinivasana (2014) and Lynch (2015). It was also contended by Salanova (2012) and Singh and Thakur (2013) that social media greatly assisted activists by providing them with a two-way communications tool that was cheap and rapid. Indeed, the April 6 Movement relied heavily on social media and was described as probably the best organized and most influential of all the opposition groups (Khamis et al, 2012).

However, as another significant finding was that the Egyptian activists were rather more organized than unorganized, this thesis challenges the idea of Gladwell (2011) who proposed that one of the reasons why social media activists will tend to fail is because they are unorganised.

Castells (2011) was correct in stating that social media was an essential catalyst to the uprisings, yet his hard view technological determinist position (which is implied by his failure to account for other contributory causes) is rejected by this thesis's findings. Instead, other factors (including authoritarianism, poverty, unemployment,

corruption and the lack of human rights) were influential (alongside social media) in generating the uprisings and leading to social/political changes. The influence of these contributory factors, as described by Dellicastelli (2011) and Brym et al (2014), imply that the soft view of technological determinism (Smith and Marx, 1994) is credible. Social media activism during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings thrust the youth to the forefront of both revolutions and was perceived as increasing women's emancipation and political participation. Social media was also perceived as contributing to the modernising of the two countries.

In particular, it was the role of social media as a public sphere for social and political debates that lay at the heart of these developments. Yet, as will become more apparent when we assess the 'Situation today' as part of the conclusion to this thesis, most of these positive social and political changes were short-lived and now barely exist, especially in Egypt where media censorship and control have become severe. This suggests that the arguments of Noam (2005) Morozov (2011) and Fuchs (2014) appear to apply to the medium-long run where social media does not necessarily raise the quality of communication, increase government accountability and can be hindered from functioning as an open public sphere because of censoring, monitoring and the arrest/detention of individual users. It should also be noted that this modernising or westernization effect was associated with scarce economic benefits for Tunisia and Egypt, as well as having negative influences on the behaviour and morals of Egyptian social media users.

CONCLUSION

THE SITUATION TODAY

Prior to setting out a conclusion to this thesis, the researcher considers it necessary to first review the social and political situations that currently exist within Tunisia and Egypt. This is deemed appropriate because it allows the study to be brought up to-date, and therefore enables a fuller conclusion to be offered with respect to the role of social media in generating social and political change from these two countries' uprisings in late 2010/early 2011.

With regard to Tunisia, it would be fair to conclude that this country has experienced the most social and political benefits from its 'spring' uprising. In fact, without being drawn into a detailed evaluation of the wider effects of the 2011 Arab uprisings, it should be recognised that Tunisia has witnessed the smoothest and most successful transition to democratic reform. A number of Arab countries' uprisings, such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, have descended into full scale bloody conflicts which can all be described as civil wars. Therefore these countries have witnessed on-going social and political chaos, which has resulted in the cumulative deaths of around three hundred thousand people of which the majority were civilians. In other Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, street protests were rapidly and violently crushed by regimes that still hold onto power. Occasional demonstrations still occur but, with the arrest and imprisonment of the most influential protest leaders, these demonstrations are weak and symbolic rather than strong and effective.

Bearing the above in mind, it is all the more remarkable that Tunisia was able to depose Ben Ali in a relatively peaceful and quick process; and this research has shown that social media should be given credit for the positive role that it played in

this regard. Elections were soon established and the new members of parliament included women and modern-thinking secularists, thereby suggesting that Tunisia is on the path to successful social and political change. However, in the last three years, there have been signs that the increasing regional instability may be having some effect upon the country. For example, in July 2013, Tunisia's secularist opposition leader Mohamed Brahmi was assassinated by jihadi sympathisers (Legge, 2013). Therefore, although Tunisia remains politically stable compared to the other Arab countries that experienced uprisings, a dangerous rift appears to be developing between secularists on the one hand and traditional Islamists on the other hand.

Similarly, in March 2015, 'gunmen killed 21 people in an attack on National Bardo Museum in Tunisia,' (Carter, 2015, p.1) and, in June 2015, Seifeddine Rezgui shot dead 38 Western tourists in the Tunisian town of Sousse (Morajea and Spencer, 2015). Furthermore, in November 2015, ISIS (Islamic State in Syria) claimed responsibility for bombing a bus in Tunis which killed 13 members of the military presidential guard (Al Jazeera, 2015). In addition, it has also been reported that 'the second highest number of non-Syrian or Iraqi ISIS fighters come from Tunisia, which are estimated at 5,000 fighters' (MEMO Middle East Monitor, 2014, page 1). This suggests there are large numbers of Tunisians who are committed to the idea of fighting violent jihad in order to establish Sharia law, including in Muslim countries such as Tunisia (Al Monitor, 2014).

With regard to Egypt, this country initially underwent a military coup immediately after the resignation of Mubarak. However the elections went ahead and the Muslim Brotherhood, a political Islamist party, won a majority in parliament with their leader Muhammad Morsi becoming President. Yet, within a year of his election, Morsi

faced huge street demonstrations from protesters who were dissatisfied with his rule. Secularists and Christians were especially vocal in their refusal to accept Morsi's Islamist agenda, including prohibiting the public selling of alcohol and the promotion of Islamic values across Egypt. Similar to Tunisia, it appears that the country's uprising generated a division and struggle for supremacy between secularists and their supporters on the one hand versus traditional Islamic conservatives on the other hand. After a couple of months of street protests in Egypt, a military coup led by General Sisi forcibly ousted Morsi as President. Thereafter, Morsi and hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood members (including its entire leadership structure) were arrested and handed lengthy prison sentences spanning many years. Similarly, hundreds of secularists and opposition activists (including the April 6th Movement leadership and many of its members) were also arrested and handed lengthy prison sentences.

In addition, Egypt's entire media has been censored with Sisi closing down all opposition TV stations, newspapers, and news outlets. Anti-coup protests broke out but these were violently crushed with the security forces killing over a thousand protesters in just three or four days. Subsequently, with no real opposition to challenge him, Sisi won a new election and became Egypt's President. The result has been increased and ongoing instability in the country with the emergence of a powerful opposition insurgency that is resisting the new dictatorial regime of Sisi. During the last two years, opposition fighters have killed hundreds of Egyptian soldiers and the regime has responded by killing more civilians, especially within the opposition stronghold region of the Sinai. Examples of this growing instability include ISIS killing of over 32 people in north-east Sinai (Kingsley and Abdo, 2015), and then another 18 (Al Arabiyah, 2015) within the same week.

Overall, there have been dozens of attacks by ISIS and Muslim Brotherhood sympathisers (dissatisfied with the military coup of Sisi which deposed legitimate president Morsi from office) including numerous attacks in the capital Cairo. In fact the jihad of ISIS in Egypt is continuing to increase in scale and ferocity, with a report in July 2015 stating that:

‘At least 100 Egyptians, including soldiers, were killed after an Islamic State affiliate launched simultaneous attacks on army checkpoints in the Sinai Peninsula, officials said. It comes two days after Egypt's top prosecutor was assassinated’ (RT News, 2015, p.1)

In November 2015, in response to Russia’s aerial bombardment of Muslims in Syria which has likely killed hundreds of Muslim civilians, ISIS in the Sinai also claimed responsibility for bringing down a flight as revenge thereby killing all 224 (crew and Russian passengers) on board. More recently, in October 2016, ISIS was also responsible for ‘killing 12 Egyptian soldiers and wounding at least six more’, whereby ‘Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi predicted a long battle against Sinai militants’ (Financial Tribune, 2016, p.1). Therefore, although social media had an influentially significant role (as both a public sphere and as an organisational/planning tool) in assisting Tunisians and Egyptians in removing their dictators from power in 2011, the social and political conditions in both countries are now precariously uncertain. This emphasises the fact that social media can easily be used for either positive or negative purposes. Different types of social media (including Twitter and YouTube) are now being utilised as supportive tools by Islamists in order to spread arguments in favour of jihad and establishing Sharia law,

with the existing governments labelling this as terrorist propaganda and so using this to justify their enforcing of more monitoring and censorship.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The aim of this research was to investigate the role of Facebook and Twitter (social media) in generating social and political change from the Tunisian and Egyptian Uprisings. Therefore, in concluding this thesis, it can be stated that evidence was found which suggests social media did play a positive role in this regard. Social media users, who used social media to help generate the two countries' uprisings, tended to be well-educated youth from the middle classes of Tunisia and Egypt. In contrast to the traditional social and cultural norms of both countries, many of the social media activists and ordinary citizens who participated in the street demonstrations were also women. Motivated by a desire to achieve a western-style democracy and more liberal lifestyle, social media activists often sought the implementation of secularism. Thus they wanted to end decades of dictatorship and remove any role for Islamic Sharia law within society.

Although Facebook and Twitter cannot be described as a perfectly functioning public sphere of openness and freedom as theorised by Habermas (1984), it can be argued that these social media were effective in offering the activists a new forum that was vital in helping to start both countries' uprisings. It was Facebook, operating as an effective public sphere, that was used to spread the initial images of Bouazzizi burning to death that subsequently started the Tunisian uprising; and similarly it was the 'We are all Khalid Said' Facebook page which initiated the largest crowds of protesters early into the Egyptian uprising. Thus, social media's importance in helping Tunisian users to publicise the uprising and to encourage participation in the

street protests does suggest the existence of aspects of a public sphere. Likewise, social media allowed users to be kept informed with regular news of the Tunisian uprising and the differences in usage between Facebook and Twitter highlight their practical application.

On the other hand, whilst social media was also used to persuade many Egyptian users to participate in the Egyptian uprising, its functioning as a public sphere was weaker in this country and more subject to criticism. The blackout of social media did not lead to a decline in the street protests but instead it was associated with a huge increase in mass demonstrations. The implied implication that Facebook and Twitter were not particularly influential in sustaining the Egyptian uprising is compounded by the dissemination of much confused misinformation, the widespread disorganisation and the immoral behavior associated with social media activism. In particular, the issue of immorality and abusive behaviour has not been highlighted in existing literature. Yet the researcher has found significance evidence to suggest this was a contributory factor as to why the secular social media activists were rejected by the population during the post-Mubarak elections.

Therefore, with reference to the theoretical framework as set out in this thesis, the theory of the public sphere offers only a limited guide to understanding social media's role as a public forum. Although social media conformed to the theory by offering an environment where activists and citizens could discuss political issues, a serious weakness of the theory is its insufficient consideration of the negative effects that arise from regime censoring and monitoring, especially in the long run. This thesis also shows that the theory must be significantly amended in order to take

adequate account of the traditional public sphere within Arab countries, most notably mosques.

In addition to its role as a public sphere for helping to start the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, social media was also utilized as an effective communicational/organizational tool by activists in both countries. It provided them with a free alternative to the telephone for keeping in touch with each other and for successfully planning their meetings and street protests. At the time of the uprisings, Facebook was far more popular than Twitter and so it was used by far more people. However, although the number of Twitter users was very small during late 2010/early 2011, it appears that the tiny number of activists using Twitter were significantly influential during the uprisings.

Overall therefore, both Facebook and Twitter are recognized for their contributions to the success of the uprisings in removing Ben Ali and Mubarak from office. It should be remembered that these two dictators had each held power for several decades, yet the uprisings forced them to leave office and brought the arrival of free, open elections. Hence, with further reference to the theoretical framework established in this thesis, this research offers support for soft view technological determinism. This is because social media was a new technology that (along with some other contributory factors such as authoritarianism, corruption, oppression, high unemployment, and poverty) enabled the activists to initiate uprisings which successfully replaced the dictators with democracy.

On the other hand, the people's use of social media as communicational/organisational tools may not necessarily give support to soft view technological determinism. In particular, the fact that Egyptians managed to

communicate and coordinate their actions even after the blackout would suggest that Facebook and Twitter are not necessarily determinant. Yet it should also be recognised that the conception of the public sphere (as defined by this thesis) is quite restrictive. If the protests themselves are considered to be a form of public sphere, then social media was fundamental in terms of promoting (indirectly, due to outrage following the blackout) the protest.

Conclusions can also be drawn from the theoretical framework in terms of technological and cultural appropriation (Berker et al, 2006; Flew and Cunningham, 2010; Lindtner et al, 2012). Applying these concepts to the context of social media usage during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, it appears that people tended to be willing users of social media, controlling both its acquisition and also its cultural effects. This then challenges the electronic colonialism narrative that the technologically dominant countries tend to control the imposition of their culture upon recipient countries through the manipulative application of new media technology (McPhail, 2006; 2008).

The researcher also suggests there is credibility for the 'transculturation' concept of Rogers (2006) which proposes that the willing acquisition of the dominant nation's technology and culture by the acquiring nation will enable that acquiring nation to develop into a different form of hybrid society altogether. This is where the hybrid society actively combines technological, cultural and social elements of the two nations together, thereby generating a new outcome of social/political change that emerges from the will of the acquiring nation. However, great tensions now exist as the different forces of democracy, secularism, Islamism and authoritarianism compete violently against each other for supremacy. Therefore, it is not clear what

type of hybrid societies will eventually emerge in Tunisia and Egypt during this post-uprisings era.

In order to assist our understanding of social media's role in generating social and political changes, the researcher suggests that the Tunisian and Egyptian Uprisings should be regarded as having two distinct phases; an early phase and a later phase. This separation of phases is deemed appropriate since it was found that the effectiveness of social media began to wane very early into the uprisings. Although this weakening was relatively slow in the more secular Tunisia where the highly westernised youth continued to use social media as a public sphere to discuss political issues, the speed of its demise was far more rapid in the more Islamic Egypt, where the traditional public sphere (especially the mosques) and face-to-face communication became more important in driving the uprising. In fact, apart from Tunisia, all of the other Arab uprisings were either crushed by the regimes or descended into bloody chaos.

The implication is that social media played a uniquely important role in helping to generate the uprisings in 2010/2011, yet these tools are not particularly effective in the longer run following regime repression, violence, and media censorship. The reversal in the fortunes of Egypt to a country that is now more unstable (both politically and economically) and more censored than it was during the Mubarak era is evidence of this fact. Following Sisi's military coup that ousted Egypt's first democratically elected President (Morsi), as well as Sisi's murdering and imprisonment of thousands of opposition activists, Egypt is now experiencing a strong and sustained Islamist insurgency which had virtually disappeared during the Mubarak era.

This research also found strong evidence of the personal courage and determination of the people in bringing about regime change, and this is another issue that is often overlooked in discussions of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Despite the absence of an organised and clear hierarchy, the citizens themselves were a driving force of the uprisings by facing violent threats from the security forces out on the streets. As discussed in the analysis section, these findings are in contradiction to the suggestions of Gladwell (2010; 2011) that the absence of a clear leadership structure will inevitably cause social media activism to descend into chaos. It appears that Gladwell (2010; 2011) underestimated the bravery of social media activists in joining street protests, and this seems to be further highlighted by his belief that social media users' relationships can be described as weak ties that will not be strong enough to transfer their activities from online to offline activism. Therefore, the findings of this thesis refute such arguments made by Gladwell (2010; 2011).

However, although the combination of social media and the protesters' bravery were critical to the removal of Ben Ali and Mubarak from power, it should be noted that the support of the country's military is also required in order for regime change to be implemented. In both Tunisia and Egypt, the military did not start killing people during those first few critical days of the uprisings and this was crucial for rapid regime change. In other Arab countries, most notably Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain, the military persecuted the activists by shooting at them during the street protests. As previously stated, the result has been civil war, slaughter and mayhem.

There had been such high optimism in early 2011 when the Arab 'spring' uprisings spread across the Arab world. The peaceful protesters took to the streets in the hope that the authoritarian regimes would finally be removed after decades in power, and

that freedom and justice would finally prevail. However, apart from Tunisia (which is itself beginning to experience increased Islamist resistance), the reality for the Arab people has been a disappointing outcome. Thus, this suggests that Tunisia's unique position (as being the first Arab country to undergo an uprising at that time) probably played a role in its relatively successful transition to democracy. The incredible speed of the uprising and the overwhelming enthusiasm of the protesters caught Ben Ali unprepared and swept him from power.

Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to remain optimistic about social media helping to generate further major reforms in Tunisia and Egypt because of certain factors. For example, one of the main reasons why social media played such a positive role during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings is because it represented a new platform where opposition activists could communicate their message to others both nationally and internationally. However, since the breakout of the Arab uprisings in 2010/2011, there has been a huge increase in the use of social media. In particular, YouTube has become extremely popular with users because of the ease with which users can upload videos and visual recordings. Yet, despite opposition activists and fighters uploading graphic images of death and destruction across Arab countries, this has not brought an end to the region's conflicts and nor has it helped to bring about regime change or a reduction in the violence.

The videoed images originating from the brutal war zone of Syria have been especially disturbing, with social media and YouTube showing the bloodied and dismembered bodies of innocent civilians, women, and children. Nonetheless, the fighting continues and dictators such as Syria's Bashar Al Assad are still firmly in power. In other countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the regimes

have learnt their lessons from the Arab uprisings of 2010/2011 by implementing tighter monitoring and censorship controls over social media (as well as over traditional media). Therefore, this implies that the possibility for regime change through social media was a unique opportunity that relates specifically to the initial uprisings period of 2010/2011. That unique moment in history has now passed, and it is unlikely to be repeated in the future.

The maintaining of any social and political gains from the uprisings is uncertain, and there is no evidence to suggest that these gains can be increased through peaceful protesting and social media activism. As stated previously, Tunisia is the exception to this rule because the country is relatively very stable, yet even within Tunisia there are increases in terrorist attacks from Islamist traditionalists who are not willing to allow the country to develop unopposed into a western-style democracy. The traditionalists regard democracy and secularism as being in contradiction to the divine Sharia Law of Allah (God) and Islam's Prophet Muhammad. Hence, many of them believe that abstaining from Islam's compulsory five daily prayers, fornication, drinking alcohol, and women not wearing the hijab (Islamic headscarf) are all serious sins that must be discouraged and punished.

However, although the limited social and political gains that social media helped to generate in Tunisia and Egypt were rapidly threatened, this does not mean that social media's role during these countries' uprisings should be considered a failure and nor does this mean that social media activism should be abandoned. The citizens of Tunisia and Egypt, just like citizens in any part of the world, deserve to be granted their hopes for democracy, freedom and a better standard of living. Yet a study of history, and the revolutions that have occurred all around the world, shows that such

ideals must usually be fought for. Such a fight tends to be bloody and often spans a number of years, where some periods are positively encouraging and other periods are not. Thus, social media represents just one small element during this period of political struggle and uncertainty – it is a useful tool that can help activism but it is not a miraculous cure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was initiated shortly after the 2011 uprisings started across the Arab world. It was a period of optimism that this would herald a new era of political freedom and social improvements, especially for the poor. The success of the first two uprisings (Tunisia and Egypt) in bringing about the removal of long established dictatorial Presidents, was influential in this spread of optimism. However, since all of the Arab uprisings (with the possible exception of Tunisia) have either failed or descended into on-going bloody conflicts, the need has now arisen for new research to be undertaken. Firstly, research is required in order to investigate the role of social media in other Arab countries during the uprisings. For example, it would be interesting to compare the effectiveness and durability of any social media activism across different uprisings. Secondly, given the rapid increase in the popularity of YouTube since the initiation of this thesis, it is suggested that YouTube and/or other forms of social media should be the subject of research. Thirdly, it is suggested that alternative research methods be employed in future research so as to add variety and credibility to the findings. For instance, limitations prevented the researcher from adopting content analysis in this thesis, yet it is a relevant and highly recommended method.

With regard to the theoretical framework of this thesis, it should be noted that the researcher utilised limited definitions for the concept of the public sphere. Thus, future research could examine the Arab uprisings based on broader definitions, including the possibility that the street protests were themselves a form of public sphere. Also, since the public sphere was the principal theory adopted by the researcher, the theory of technological and cultural appropriation was utilised only as a complement to the public sphere. Therefore, whilst it is recognised that the appropriation of both technology and culture are two distinct concepts, their complementary usage means they were not explored in separate detail by this thesis. Future research could address this by individually investigating the appropriation of both technology and culture in more depth.

In terms of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, this research has concluded that social media had a positive effect in their generation of public outcry by playing a crucial role as a new public sphere and also as an organisational tool for activism. However, a realist assessment of today's situation suggests that the potential for a future repeat of such uprisings are highly unlikely in the Arab World. With media monitoring and censoring, as well as conflict and authoritarianism, the Arab region is ever more in need of political stability. Yet the risk is that any social and political reforms generated by social media activism could actually be negated in the face of such conflict and authoritarianism.

Whether it was communism in countries such as Russia and China or democracy in countries such as the USA, France and the UK, these forms of government could only be established following revolutionary warfare, which enabled the new form of governance to be implemented by lethal force. Therefore, bearing this in mind, it is

reasonable to assume that Tunisia and Egypt will now also experience a period of sustained armed struggle as the Islamists attempt to achieve their hopes for power through such violent means. The spread of westernised behaviour among many Tunisians and Egyptians (such as alcohol consumption, drug use and being scantily dressed in public [in clothes such as swimwear, short skirts and shorts] especially by foreign tourists on the beaches and in hotels) appears to be no longer accepted by traditional Islamists in these two countries as suggested by recent attacks reported in newspapers (Morajea and Spencer, 2015; Al Arabiyah, 2015). Thus, different types of social media (including Twitter and YouTube) are now being utilised as supportive tools by Islamists in order to spread arguments in favour of jihad and establishing Sharia law, with the existing governments labelling this as terrorist propaganda and so enforcing more monitoring and censorship. Therefore, ISIS and other jihadist groups' use of social media should be studied in greater detail in the future. This is because significant challenges to the status quo are being made by these traditionalists who are currently seeking to establish Sharia law and orthodox Islam in both Tunisia and Egypt.

APPENDIX

Appendix A:

Information Form

Who _____ I _____ am

My name is Mohammad Mesawa, and I am a PhD student at Salford University in the United Kingdom.

The title of my thesis is “The role of Facebook and Twitter in generating social and political change during the Arab Spring Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.”

Why _____ I _____ need _____ your _____ help

I want to understand how important Facebook and Twitter has been to the opposition activists. Therefore, your opinions would be really appreciated.

Voluntary

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part, and you can drop out at any time you want.

Confidentiality

Your identity will be kept confidential, and any information you provide will be encrypted and kept safe.

Even if this research’s findings are published in an academic journal, your identity will still be kept secret. In fact your name and other personal information (such as your email address) will not be recorded or stored.

Interviews

I only ask that you spare me some time to complete an interview with me. The questions relate to the role of Facebook and Twitter during the Arab Spring.

Thank you very much for your time and effort!

Appendix B: Interview Questions

(A) General questions

Explain the factors that caused the Uprising to start.

Explain the factors that caused the Uprising to continue.

Explain the factors that caused the Uprising to successfully overthrow the President.

Describe the role of Facebook and Twitter during the Uprising.

How influential was Facebook and Twitter during the Uprising?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook and Twitter as political tools for activists?

Explain any obstacles that prevent Facebook and Twitter from being effectively used as political tools for activists.

(B) Facebook and Twitter as a public sphere for activism

How effective were Facebook and Twitter in raising public awareness of the Uprisings? Please explain.

How effective were Facebook and Twitter in persuading people to join the street protests? Please explain.

How effective were Facebook and Twitter in spreading the activists' messages to the outside world? Please explain.

Explain whether discussions on Facebook and Twitter will tend to change peoples' opinions or strengthen their existing opinions.

What was the role and importance of places such as the masjid, coffee shop, and majlis etc for generating the Uprising?

(C) Facebook and Twitter as organisational tools for activists

How important were Facebook and Twitter as tools to help the activists organise their activities?

How well organised were Facebook and Twitter activists?

(D) The role of Facebook and Twitter in generating social/political change

Are there any ways in which Facebook and Twitter have changed your society? Please explain.

Are there any ways in which Facebook and Twitter have brought political change to your society? Please explain.

Are there any ways in which Facebook and Twitter have changed the role of women during the uprisings? Please give examples.

Is there anything else would like to say or add to this discussion?

Appendix C: Questionnaire

* Required

Sex *

Please tick the relevant box

- Male
- Female

Age *

- 18-24
- 25-31
- 32-38
- 39-45
- 46-50
- over 50

Marital Status

- Married

- Not married

Child/Children *

- Yes
- No

Educational Level *

- School
- College
- University Degree
- Master's Degree
- Post graduate e.g PhD

Occupation *

Personal income group per annum (Dollars): *

(A) Facebook and Twitter as a public sphere for activism

Open political discussions took place on Facebook and/or Twitter *

- A) Yes. Open political discussions took place before, during and after the Uprising.

- B) Yes, but Facebook and/or Twitter were sometimes monitored by the authorities.
- C) Yes, but Facebook and/or Twitter were usually monitored by the authorities.
- E) No. Open political discussions did not take place because of fear.

Discussions on Facebook and/or Twitter increased public awareness of the Uprising *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Discussions on Facebook and/or Twitter persuaded large numbers of people to join the street protests *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter were very important for helping the activists get their message to the outside world *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Discussions on Facebook and/or Twitter often change people's opinions *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Discussions on Facebook and/or Twitter usually strengthen people's existing opinions *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter were more important (for influential political discussions) than traditional places (such as the Mosque, coffee shops, sheesha bars, and majlis etc). *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter caused the Uprising to start in your country. *

- A) Yes. Without Facebook and/or Twitter, the Uprising would not have happened.
- B) No. Without Facebook and/or Twitter, the Uprising would still have happened.
- C) Do not know

Facebook and/or Twitter drove and sustained the Uprising in your country. *

- A) Yes. Facebook and/or Twitter were the MAIN driving force that sustained the Uprising in my country.
- B) No. Other factors were the MAIN driving force that sustained the Uprising in my country (such as dictatorship, corruption, poverty, and lack of human rights etc).
- C) Facebook and/or Twitter had the same importance as other factors in driving/sustaining the Uprising in my country.

(B) Facebook and Twitter as organisational tools for activists

Facebook and/or Twitter were very important for helping activists to plan and organise the Uprising (street protests etc). *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter activists had an organised hierarchy and clear leadership structure during the Uprising *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

(C) The role of Facebook and Twitter in generating social/political change

Facebook and/or Twitter have generated social change: *

- A) Yes. And the social change has been generally positive.

- B) Yes. And the social change has been generally negative.
- C) To a small extent. And the social change has been generally positive.
- D) To a small extent. And the social change has been generally negative.
- E) No. They have not.
- D) Do not know.

Facebook and/or Twitter have generated political change: *

- A) Yes. And the political change has been generally positive.
- B) Yes. And the political change has been generally negative.
- C) To a small extent. And the political change has been generally positive.
- D) To a small extent. And the political change has been generally negative.
- E) No. They have not.
- D) Do not know.

Facebook and/or Twitter speeded up the pace of change in my country *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know

- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter caused more women to join the street protests

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter caused more women to become political or activist leaders

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter can just as easily be used for bad as it can be used for good *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter encourage ideas of democracy and freedom *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter develop Arabs' minds so they become more modern *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter encourage Arabs to imitate Western culture *

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

There are many false personalities on Facebook and Twitter

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Many unverifiable users on Facebook and Twitter were encouraging Egyptians to demonstrate

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter have been used by western governments to control the minds of Arabs

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Facebook and/or Twitter have been used by western governments to control the behaviour of Arabs

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Do not know
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

APPENDIX C: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES GENERATED FROM THE TUNISIAN INTERVIEWS

THEME 1: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE TUNISIAN UPRISING

Importance of social media

Social media versus other factors

Role of censorship and monitoring

THEME 2: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

Publicising the Uprising and encouraging participation in it

Keeping users informed with regular news of the Uprising

Differences in usage between Facebook and Twitter

Social media versus the traditional public sphere

THEME 3: SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ORGANISATIONAL TOOL FOR ACTIVISM

A tool for activism planning and organizing

THEME 4: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Social media as a democratising force

Social media and youth

Social media and women

Overall evaluation of social media and social/political change

**APPENDIX D: FINDINGS FROM EGYPTIAN INTERVIEWS:
THEME 1: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE EGYPTIAN
UPRISING**

Social media versus other factors

Role of censorship and monitoring

Social media during the blackout

THEME 2: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

Social media persuaded many users to participate in the street protests

Social media spread some confusion and nonsense

Social media versus the traditional public sphere

**THEME 3: SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ORGANISATIONAL TOOL FOR
ACTIVISM**

A tool for activism planning and organizing

Organized versus disunity

THEME 4: SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Social media and youth

Social media and women

Social media and immoral behaviour

Overall evaluation of social media and social/political change

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