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# The Influence of Social Media in Egypt during The Arab Spring

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# **THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EGYPT DURING THE ARAB SPRING**

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PIM 72  
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A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Service, Leadership, and Management at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA  
December 2016

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## ABSTRACT

In the past 10 years social media has become a way of communicating, following the news, posting pictures, and marketing for brands. The platforms including Facebook and Twitter continue to grow, making them an ideal way of communication all across the world. It has been argued that what happened in the Arab Spring in 2010 was shaped and influenced by more people having access to the internet, and therefore having signed up for social media sights. The act of one man sent a region swirling into turmoil, political overthrow, and in some cases, such as Egypt, creating a revolution.

In this paper I researched the influence that social media had in Egypt during the Arab Spring. I examined the events that led to the Arab Spring and how they were shaped by social media as well as the Egyptian Revolution, that some claim to be a Facebook Revolution.

The research was conducted based on an online Facebook survey. I found that though social media was used to schedule protests and demonstrations, the primary influence was creating awareness for people outside of the country.

## ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Social Media-** Websites and applications that allow for User Generated Content (UGC) and participation in social networking

**User Generated Content (UGC)-** Forms of media created by users on an online system or service, usually posted onto social media websites.

**Twitter-** A micro-blogging website and service that allows for users to share updates in real time by using 140 characters or less, along with photos or video. Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone, and Noah Glass founded Twitter in 2006 (Twitter, n.d.).

**Tweeting-** The act of using Twitter

**Hashtag (#)-** Adding a # before a word, creates a hyperlink, it is most common to use a # to connect to trending topics, or calls to action on social media sites (Coleman, 2015).

**Facebook-** Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook in 2004. It is a social networking site used to connect and share with friends and family across the globe (Carlson, 2010).

**YouTube-** A video sharing website founded in 2005 by three former PayPal employees, Chard Hurley, Jawed Karim, and Steve Chen (Bellis, 2016).

**MENA-** The acronym MENA refers to the Middle East and North Africa regions. This four-letter acronym became highly used during the Arab Spring.

## **Introduction**

The story of how I ended up in Egypt and discovering my research topic requires some backtracking. Before starting graduate school I had studied abroad in Morocco, I was there during the start of the Arab Spring. I quickly discovered that my heart was with the people across the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region fighting for the basic human rights I had at home. When I left the SIT (School of International Training) graduate program in May of 2013, I was more confused than ever with what path to follow next, and where exactly I wanted that path to take me. After extensive research and pro/con lists, I settled on a practicum site in my college city of Austin, Texas. I landed a practicum in, at the time was my dream industry, textile manufacturing with a purpose. I started working with Open Arms, an organization that hired refugee women to make a sustainable clothing line using repurposed textiles. I was the operations intern, and one of my responsibilities was to oversee the volunteers. As happy as I was working there I still had the dream of living abroad.

As a Global Studies major in undergrad I had a focus in the Middle East and North Africa. My goal was always to spend extensive time in the region; little did I know, that dream was right on the horizon. While I was working at Open Arms I met an American woman who had lived in Egypt with her husband. During their 8 years in the country they opened an American style restaurant called Jared's Bagels. I quickly became close to her and began expressing my desire to go to Egypt. One day in December she approached me and asked if I wanted to join her and her husband on a ten day visit to Cairo. I quickly booked my flights, despite not leaving until mid February. Before I knew it I was on the plane heading to my dream country. I was in Egypt for four days when I called my parents to tell them I would be moving there, my field study for

graduate school was completed and I wasn't sure what was next. I was offered a position as Operations Assistant Manager and I was back in Egypt a month later.

Egypt was everything I hoped it would be and so much more, however the job was not a good fit and five months into it, I put in my resignation. I had no problem finding a job, this time working at a nightclub called Vent that was located in the heart of Cairo. Working at Vent was mindless and easy but it did open my eyes to a new demographic of Egyptians that I hadn't previously been exposed to, the upper class. I met musicians, businessmen, world travelers, teachers, and people from all walks of life. I was unchallenged there and shortly jumped to a new job. I was to be an account manager at a social media agency.

I knew about social media but had never studied its use for advertising and marketing. On my first day I was assigned four clients, one of whom happened to be the highest paying client of that agency. I was under pressure to learn quickly and not to disappoint. The job was grueling and high stress but I found a way to express brands in a creative manner. I began studying all aspects of social media and quickly realized the impact it had, not only in marketing but for social change. I reflected back to the Arab Spring and the things that were accomplished because of the use of sites like Facebook and Twitter, this led me to my **research question**: What was the influence of social media in Egypt during the Arab Spring? As well as my **subquestions**: What were the primary social media platforms used? Is social media an effective tool for political discussions? and Would the Arab Spring been possible without social media?



## Literature Review

### Tunisian Revolution

On December 17, 2010 a twenty-six-year-old vegetable vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the municipal building in the town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, about two hundred miles south of the capital of Tunis. His vegetable cart had been confiscated and his complaint was completely dismissed by the government (Al-Saleh, 2015). He was the sole breadwinner for his single parent family, he supported his mother, had the burden of paying bills and he could no bear those things any longer. However what really set Bouazizi off was when he was slapped in public by a female police officer (Herrera, 2015).

The act of setting himself on fire was symbolic because in Islam burning oneself is seen as unacceptable. The burning of documents symbolizing one's identity is referred to as the phenomenon called *harragas* an Arabic term meaning 'those who burn', this takes place when young people burn their documents upon their illegal arrival in Europe. They burn their papers because to them living as an illegal immigrant is more fulfilling than to be sent back to their home county (Al-Saleh, 2015). This act of protest unraveled the many issues normal young Arabs faced on a daily basis.

The events that unfolded after Bouazizi's act of bravery could not have been predicted by anyone. Unfortunately he would not live to see the series of revolutions, revolts, and dramatic change that led to the Arab Spring. Following his death, his mother staged a protest in the spot where her son had killed himself. She became known as the "mother of the nation" and quickly thereafter the "mother of Arab revolutions." Her story spread throughout Tunisia and the rest of

the MENA region, as a result many other men and women felt inspired to stand up against their government (Herrera, 2015).

### **Spreading of the Arab Spring**

Shortly after Bouazizi's death, a wave of demonstrations took place throughout the MENA region. The degrees of participation varied from country to country; some countries even managed to overthrow the 'dictators' that ran their country. Though some protests were more successful than others, everyone sought the same purpose: change. They wanted freedom and change from the people who had been running their country for years. In Egypt it was President Hosni Mubarak, in Libya it was President Muammar Gaddafi, for Syria it was President Bashar Al-Assad, for Tunisia it was President Ben Ali, and for Yemen it was President Ali Saleh; most of these leaders had been in office for over twenty years. The major changes occurred in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria. However significant events still unfolded in the rest of the region including: Bahrain, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, and Syria. Though most countries saw the changes they were seeking, the change in some cases was not positive, such as Syria and Yemen, who are still facing a civil war (Blight, Pullman, Torpey, 2011).

Social Media was said to be the main contributing factor of the Arab Spring. There were three primary social media outlets used during the revolution: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; each social media outlet served a different purpose. Facebook was used to set the date of the protest; Twitter was used to share the logistics, YouTube to show the world, via video, the demonstrations, protests, and authentic content that were happening in the MENA region but most of all, they were all used to connect people (Gerbaudo, 2012).

## **Social Media**

Social Media is defined as internet based tools that create and build social networks and relationships with people that share a common interest. The platforms allow users to create a profile, or some other type of online representation and share their ideas, events, activities, and interests with their network.

According to some, social media contributed to the revolution in 4 ways:

(a) By making it easier for disaffected citizens to act publicly in coordination; (b) by creating information cascades that bolstered protesters' participation of the likelihood of success; (c) by raising the costs of repression by the ruling regimes; and (d) by dramatically increasing publicity through diffusion of information to regional and global politics (Youmans and York, p. 316, 2012).

There was no platform that served all of the functions listed above, it was the accumulation of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube used by activists. These social networks “inform, mobilize, entertain, create communities, increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable.” (Ghannam, 2011). It is argued that “social networking tools have the potential to enhance citizen engagement in the region, promote social inclusion, and create opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and development.” (Dubai School of Government, 2011).

Twitter is a free, web-based micro blogging service that allows users to embrace the use of ‘micro-content’; the platform only allows the publishing of 140 characters or less at a time. Users can publish multiple Tweets with embedded images, videos, and URLs that link to more content. Trending topics on Twitter (and Facebook) can be searched by using a hashtag (#). In order to send a Tweet at specific users, an ‘@’ symbol is used, followed by the person’s

username. Users can also retweet Tweets, creating a larger network, which allows more people to contribute to the Twitter stream. A user's Tweet will appear on a Twitter timeline, a collection of streamed Tweets listed in real time from a person's selected followers. This platform makes it ideal for the basic structure of real time narration while expanding on the ability to tell a story. The population of Twitter in the Arab region at the end of March 2011 was 6.6 million users, Tweeting about 252 thousand Tweets per day, breaking down to about 175 Tweets per minute or 3 Tweets a second (Peys, 2012). The most common hashtags in the first quarter of 2010 were #Egypt and #Jan25 each being Tweeted about 1.3 million times, #Egypt was also one of the top used Tweets in 2011 (Peys, 2012). As of 2012 Twitter worldwide had 360 million users, and it was estimated that the social network was growing by 460 thousand users a day (Peys, 2012).

In the Arab world alone, about 17 million people were signed up for Facebook as of 2011, five million of those being solely in Egypt (Ghannam, 2012). By using this platform users were able to become citizen journalist for people all across the globe, giving real time updates about the revolution happening in Egypt.

### **History of Social Media in Social Movements**

The Arab Spring was not the first time social media was used to fight for social change in Egypt. In 2003 cyber activists organized a day of street demonstrations to be held on February 15. The demonstrations were to protest against the United States invasion in Iraq. Though the invasion still took place, people in over 600 cities across the United States, Europe, and North Africa took part (Herrera, 2014). The next example was in 2004 when the *Kefya* Movement also known as The Egyptian Movement for Change took place. This group used their own websites and blogs to organize anti-Mubarak demonstrations (Herrera, 2014). They brought together

Islamists, Leftists, and Nasserists who united to try to put an end to the Emergency Law and advocate for democracy (Herrera 2014). By 2007 Facebook was becoming more popular than blogging. In March 2008 one of Egypt's first influential Facebook groups was started by Israa Abdel Fatah and Ahmed Maher called *Harakat Shabab 6 Abril* (6th of April Youth Movement). The group called for people to meet in the Nile Delta City of Al Mahalla al-Kubra to support a general strike (happening,) planned by textile workers (Herrera, 2014). The organization via Facebook was successful, however the two creators of the group were arrested shortly after the group was created. The on-ground demonstrators used Twitter to share their locations, coordinate movements, and keep track of police (Herrera, 2014). These demonstrations organized by the internet were just the beginning of social movements in Egypt.

### ***Kullena Khaled Said***

The most well known social movement before the Egyptian Revolution started as a result of the murder of Khaled Said. On the night of June 6, 2010 Khaled Said was sitting in an Internet café 30 meters from his home in Alexandria, Egypt when two plain-clothed police officers entered and began attacking the twenty-eight year old. When the owner kicked them out of the café the police dragged him to the main street and continued to violently beat him, resulting in his death (Herrera, 2014). Once he was pronounced dead, the police officers threw his body in the back of their unmarked police truck and drove off. Shortly after their departure they returned, only to throw the body back on the streets and leave it as if nothing happened (Herrera, 2014). His body was found deformed, severely mutilated, and unrecognizable. The reasons as to why this happened remained unanswered, however the murder of Khaled Said was technically done legally. At the time, Egypt was running under "Emergency Law" which extends

the power to the police while suspending the due process of law and the constitutional right of the citizen (Herrera, 2014). There are three theories as to why Khaled was attacked that evening; the first stated that he was killed because he refused to pay the police a bribe, something that was not uncommon as police were notorious for violence and extortion. The second believed Said choked after swallowing a piece of marijuana he was trying to hide from the officers. This idea was closely observed as he was a heavy cannabis user, but it does not explain why his face was so mutilated upon death. The final theory believes Khaled captured a video of policemen dividing their spoils after a drug bust (Herrera, 2014). He was not an active blogger, nor active on social media however his potential role as a citizen journalist sparked the interest of many. The reason why he was targeted may never be known, but his death triggered a great reaction.

On Thursday June 10, 2010 at 9:01pm, the first Thursday after the murder of Khaled Said, a Facebook group launched with the name *Kullena Khaled Said* (We are All Khaled Said). There would later be an English Facebook page called We are All Khaled Said, in order to involve western nations with the events in Egypt. This was not the first Facebook group seeking justice for Khaled, however the admin of the new group believed that the other groups used hostile language and doing so would not be received positively by the government (Ghonim, 2012). The administrator (admin) of the new page avoided phrases that would be used by activists, as he wanted to keep the group as peaceful as possible. These groups did however work together to achieve a common cause. Within the first 24 hours of the page going live, there were well thought out posts introducing the purpose of the group, which was to prove to people that what happened to Khaled was happening to many Egyptians on a daily basis (Herrera, 2014). By the end of the first day, there were already 70,000 members in the group (Ghonim, 2012). The

day following the creation of the page, there was to be a funeral for Khaled Said in Alexandria. There was also a protest on the same day which was organized by the April 6 Youth Movement. The anonymous administrator of the Kullena Khaled Said group used the pseudonym *El shaheed* meaning the martyr, because Khaled was considered the martyr of the Egyptian Law (Herrera, 2014). It was later revealed that *El shaheed* was none other than a Google marketing executive, Wael Ghonim. He chose to remain anonymous for as long as possible, as he feared for his safety and never wanted to be considered a hero. Wael did not act alone during his time as admin of *Kullena Khaled Said*, he appointed a co-admin position to AbdelRahman Mansour, in case he was to find himself in trouble.

When the first online campaign *El shaheed* was launched, it called for members of the group to change their profile pictures to a banner that was designed anonymously in remembrance of Khaled Said (Ghonim, 2012). Though thousands responded, Wael knew he needed to create a strategy with a mission. His mission was to mobilize public support for Khaled. Since Wael was an internet expert he knew exactly how he was going to accomplish online support. He would first ask people to join the page and read the posts, after that the page was to gain interactions by having users ‘like’ and ‘comment’ on posts (thus allowing a larger reach of the Facebook page), the third step was to get the users to create their own content to post on the page, and the fourth and final step would happen when people decided to take action by taking activism to the streets of Cairo (Ghonim, 2012). Wael’s next campaign asked users to take photos of themselves with a sign saying “*Kullena Khaled Said*”. This campaign also created a lot of user generated content that helped spread awareness across Facebook (Ghonim, 2012).

The first demonstration that *El shaheed* took to the streets was suggested by a member of the Facebook group. The member suggested having people gather on the corniche of Alexandria with everyone's backs to the street. The demonstration was to be called a 'Silent Stand' as they wanted it to be as peaceful as possible. It was also recommended that participants bring a copy of the Qur'an or Bible to read in peace, as well as to wear black in order to all stand out (Ghonim, 2012). Soon after, the date was set and a Facebook event was created. *El shaheed* worked around the clock to make the 'Silent Stand' happen, he exerted effort by posting on the Facebook group constantly, in order to keep members engaged and updated with the status on what was happening.

During the silent stand he was sure to post every picture that users sent of people lined up on the corniches in other cities. Though the turnout was not as large as expected, due to security concerns, *El shaheed* and the team were pleased with the results, as many of the men and women that came out were not generally political activists. It was later reported by Reuters that more than 8,000 people came out for the 'Silent Stand' (Ghonim, 2012). As numbers started coming in on the Facebook group it was discovered that 81% of the group's members were under the age of 30 years old, and more than half of those were between the ages of 18-24. This was important to know, as the younger generation would be the ones to rule the future Egyptian Revolution (Ghonim, 2012).

The group continued its' growth with eventually over 300,000 group members, it was a free and efficient way to convey information about demonstrations including the times, dates, and locations (Herrera, 2014). The Facebook page started to gain its own culture of peace and inclusivity creating a stronger community. The focus was evolving from seeking justice for



Khaled, to the abuse of the police, and the condition of Egypt. Wael's online activism in the Facebook page became widely known in other parts of the MENA region. When the protests in Tunisia started in December 2010, Wael knew his chance was coming to make a difference, he just had to be calculated and precise with his approach. The protests started in Tunisia, shortly after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi.

In January, two minutes into the new year, a bomb exploded outside the Two Saints Church, a Coptic Church in Alexandria while a service was in progress, 21 people were killed dozens more injured (Fahim and Stack, 2011). On January 14, ten days before Egypt's National Police Day protest was scheduled, President Ben Ali of Tunisia fled the country after 23 years of ruling the country (Herrera 2014). This was an action that nobody saw coming, but gave hope for Egyptians. That day Facebook's trending status was congratulating the Tunisians on the success of overthrowing their dictator. *El shaheed* encouraged Egyptians to follow Tunisia in their quest to overthrow their dictator (Herrera 2014). That same day *El shaheed* and AbdelRahman decided to plan a 'celebration' for the National Police Day in Egypt on January 25. The National Police Day celebrated the day in 1952 when British troops killed police officers in small town on the coast of the Red Sea, near the Suez Canal.

### **January 25**

The day before the National Police Day in Egypt, *El shaheed* posted on the *Kullena Khaled Said* Facebook page explaining the protocol for the January 25 protests. The post covered six points: who the protesters were, why they were protesting, why January 25 was chosen, the demands, the time and places of the meeting points for the protests, the protesting guidelines, and the chants that were to be used. The reason for protesting stressed the point that the revolution

was not to be a coup, but more so a revolution against the government to reclaim the people's rights (Ghonim, 2012). The locations of the protests were announced and stated that they would be kept updated as security threats came in. The admins of the Facebook group could not stress the importance of maintaining a disciplined and peaceful approach as it was known the security forces were going to do whatever they could to make the protesters appear as thugs. They asked for people to bring Egyptian flags, and to use the agreed upon chants:

Long live Egypt... Long live Egypt

Bread...Freedom...Human dignity

Dear Freedom, where are you? Emergency law is keeping us away from you!

We will not fear, we will not bow... like we've done for so long!

It's my right to find work and love... The petty income is not enough<sup>1</sup>

The hype of January 25 spread from various Facebook groups, Twitter, televised media, and newspapers. It was being predicted that Egypt was to be the next Tunisia.

The first coordinated protests which eventually led to the revolution in Egypt began on January 25. The people in Egypt were demanding President Mubarak step down from office after reigning for nearly thirty years; they were requesting an end to Emergency law, a raise in salaries, more job opportunities, addressing the issue of poverty, and placing a two term limit on the presidency (Al-Saleh, 2015). The protests quickly escalated from peaceful as planned to violent, turning the country into a 'war like zone'. It caused the government to quickly block social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook, and shut down the Internet and mobile networks which was referred to as the 'kill switch' (Ghannam, 2011). The government also

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<sup>1</sup> The chants have been translated from Arabic to English

implemented a curfew (Herrera, 2015). Though these networks of communication to outside of the country were blocked, users still found a way to connect to let the world know what was happening. The day following the first protests the police cracked down, and began implementing their rights under Emergency Law. They used tear gas, force, and arrested hundreds of people including foreign journalists, and *El shaheed* (Shenker, 2011). Four days into the Egyptian protests, on January 29 President Hosni Mubarak made his first television appearance, pledging his commitment to running a democratic state and ensuring the country that changes would be made (Delacoura, 2012). The next day he appointed his intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman as his first vice president since being in office (Beaumont, Shenker, Harris, 2011). The protests continued for more than 2 weeks.

February 4 became known as Egypt's day of departure; the highest number of demonstrators came out to Cairo's *Tahrir* (Liberation) Square demanding the resignation of President Mubarak. The Egyptian government said they would be issuing in 15% raise in salaries and in pensions for the public payroll, this order of business would cost the country roughly \$960 million dollars (McGreal and Tran, 2011). Though this was a step in the right direction for Egypt (as viewed by some), Mubarak was still refusing to step down until April; most Egyptians were not pleased, as they wanted him out of office as soon as possible. The increased wages were seen as a bribe from the government to postpone the resignation of Mubarak.

On February 11 after eighteen days of protests and over three hundred deaths, Vice President Omar Suleiman announced that President Mubarak would be officially stepping down from power and would be handing over control of the country to the Supreme Council of The Armed Forces (SCAF). President Mubarak agreed to step down in order for the country to hold

proper democratic elections, however he requested to stay in office to oversee presidential elections. As the protest continued in Egypt, international politicians feared that rushing democratic elections would allow the Muslim Brotherhood to take office, which would be viewed as a step back for the country. Fear also began to arise over the one billion dollar loss that had happen due to the lack of tourism, because during the protests over one million tourists has fled the country (Blight, Pullman, Torpey, 2011). The protesters demanded a democratic election at the earliest possible date, however the military said they were going to rule under martial law which grants security forces arrest powers, until elections were held (Blight, Pullman, Torpey, 2011).

Former president Hosni Mubarak was charged with conspiring to kill hundreds of people and was sentenced to life in prison, however in 2013 the charges were dropped. He now resides in a military hospital (What's Become of Egypt's Morsi, 2015). As for the future of Egypt the change protesters sought did not come until June 2012. On June 1, 2012 after thirty-one years, the Emergency Law was officially lifted (BBC News, 2012). Egypt also elected a new president, Mohammed Morsi. However, he was considered an “ambiguous milestone in Egypt’s promised transition to democracy” (Kirkpatrick, p. 1, 2012). He was the first president in Egypt elected from the radical Islamist party: The Muslim Brotherhood. The following year he was overthrown, as people believed he was less concerned with social and economic change and more concerned about political power (What's Become of Egypt's Morsi, 2015). Social movements claimed to be the source of his demise, just like Mubarak. Morsi was sentenced to 20 years of hard labor for the torture of protestors. He was eventually sentenced to death, as well as another sentence of life in prison for conspiring to commit terroristic acts. Finally, after years of

upheaval and unrest Egypt experienced a proper democratic election in 2014 where their current president, Sisi was elected, winning by a landslide (Aljazeera, 2014). The country is currently in a stable state and the citizens appear to be happy with the changes this president has made which include a 4.5% increase in economic growth (El Shahed, 2015). Though countries in the Middle East and North Africa have faced challenging times over the past few years, citizens remain hopeful that the situation will turn back into a normal peaceful place.

## Methodology

My research was conducted via an eleven question online survey that I created myself. I had initially aimed for 100 participants to take my survey, however I felt that during the research process 80 was sufficient. I posted the online survey in English and Arabic on my Facebook page as well as several others including: SIT Graduate Institute Class of 2017, Egyptian Streets, 6th of April Youth Movement, February 20 Movement, and Southern Vermont Young Professionals. Since I asked participants to take the survey anonymously, I am unsure of how many people from each group took it. I posted the survey on my Facebook page 4 times during the week. On October 6, I posted the survey on all the previously mentioned Facebook groups, as the week continued I decided at random which groups to post on; I did not post every day on every Facebook page as I did not want to spam the groups. Below is an example of what I posted on the February 20 Youth Movement Page, as well as the other Arabic speaking Facebook groups.



Nicole Reed

October 6 at 10:14am

I am a graduate student studying the influence of social media on the Arab Spring. I would appreciate it if you could take ten minutes to answer this survey. Thank you.

<https://surveyplanet.com/57e961d86755ef6edbb2e532>

أنا طالبة دراسات عليا أدرس تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على الربيع العربي. وسأكون شاكراً جداً لو منحتموني 10 دقائق فقط من وقتكم لإكمال هذا الاستبيان. جزيل الشكر مقدماً.

<https://surveyplanet.com/57f299a86d03520cdabd815c>

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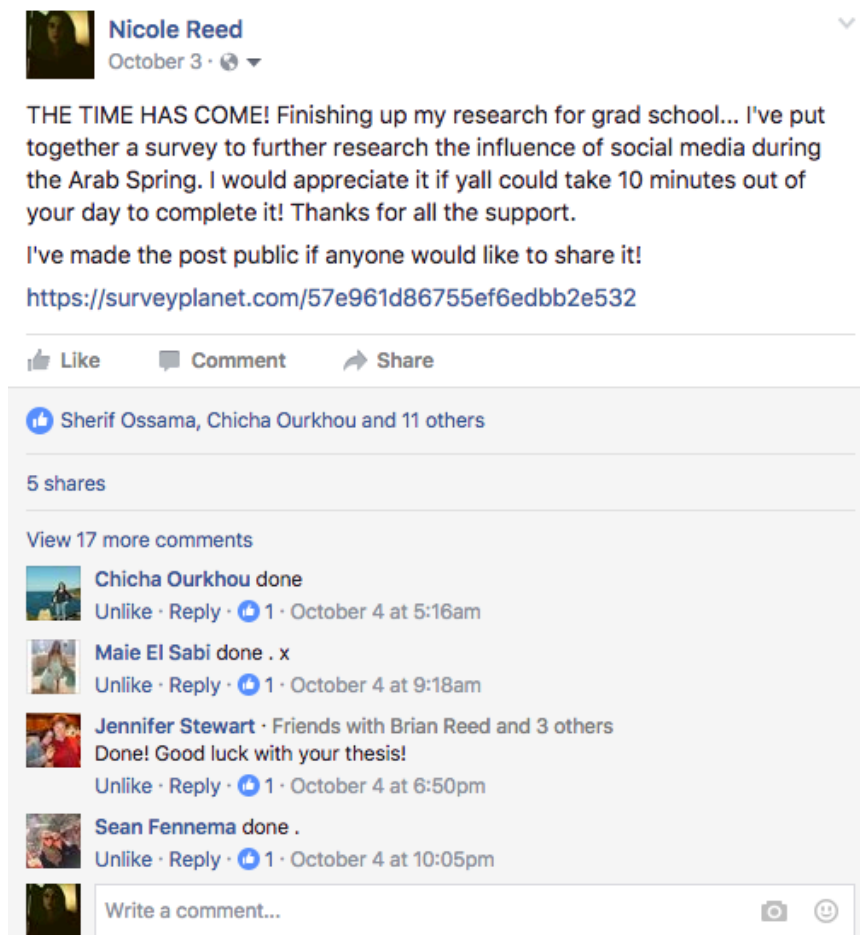
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Like

Comment

Share

As of October 3, I had 840 friends on Facebook, with more than 125 of those connections currently living in Egypt. The post on my Facebook wall received 5 shares from connections living across the globe. Participants were selected at their own choice from the posts on the previously mentioned Facebook pages. Below is an example of a post I made on my Facebook account.



The research was collected in survey format, as I wanted to see the precise number of people with knowledge on the Arab Spring and the correlation between the Arab Spring and social media. I decided to make the survey anonymous because I wanted to create a safe space for participants to be able to speak openly about their knowledge and participation in the Arab

Spring. I found that conducting my on online survey would be the most efficient way to gather data, as the research topic deals with social media. (See Appendix B)

Of the 80 participants that took the survey, two participants had to be thrown out for inappropriate and irrelevant answers, therefore the research was conducted out of 78 participants. 77 out of 78 participants took the survey in English while 1 person took the survey in Arabic. I believe more people took the survey in English because of the roughly 125 friends that I have in Egypt, they are all bilingual. There were also more Americans that took the survey than other nationalities.

The demographics of the participants were as follows:

Question 1: Country of current residence: 13% Egypt, 80% USA, and 7% other.

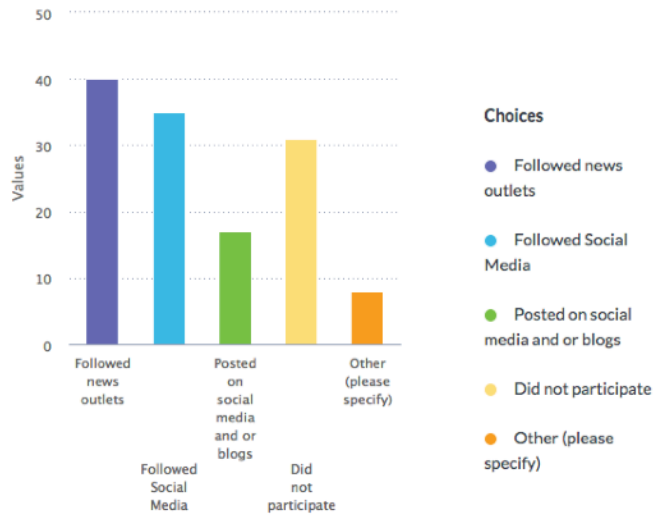
Question 2: Nationality: 14%, Egyptian, 70% American, and 16% other

Question 3: Age of participants: less than 1% was under the age of 20, 41% were between the ages of 21 and 30, less than 1% was between the ages of 31 and 40, 13% were between ages of 41 and 50, 27% were between ages of 51 and 60, 1 % was between the ages of 61 and 70, and less than 1% was above the age of 70.

Question 4: Gender: 51% male and 49% female

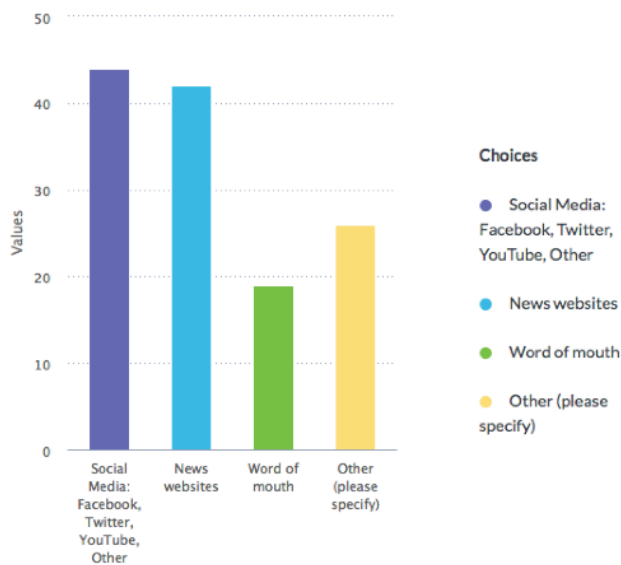
On question 5, 61% of those surveyed said they were familiar with the Arab Spring in some way, of those 60% participated by either following the news, following social media (49%), or posting on social media and/or blogs (22%). Below is a chart to show the break down of participation (Question 6).



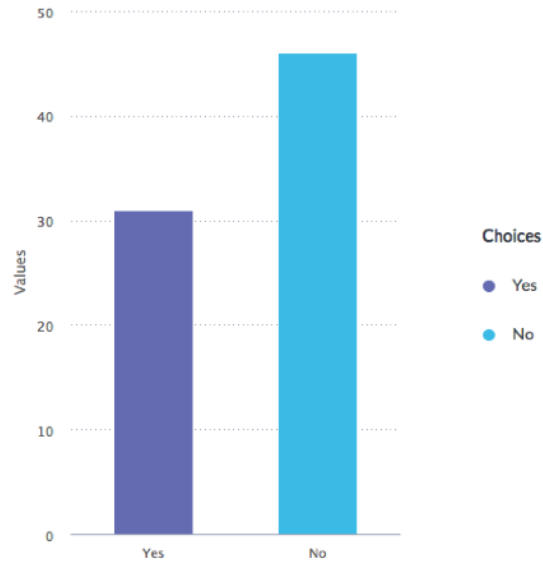


13% of those surveyed posted on social media during the Arab Spring. 15% of those surveyed considered themselves a participant in the Arab Spring. Less than 1% of people participated on the ground in Egypt, of those the participation ranged from reporting for an English based news sources, providing supplies, and attending protests.

Question 7 looked at the sources in which information was maintained. The graph below breaks down the sources.

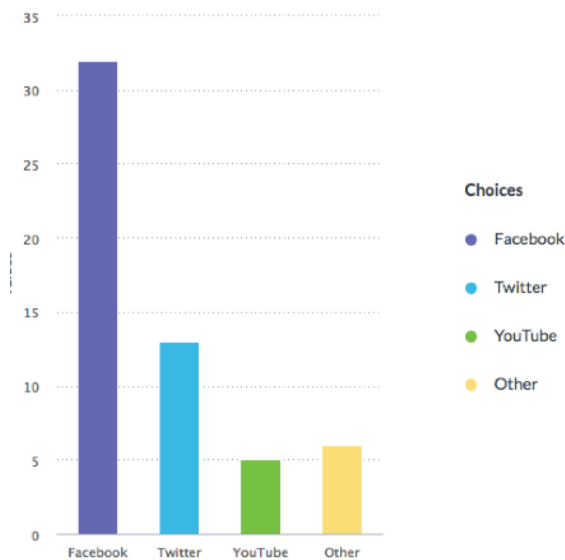


Of those surveyed 40% of people said they posted on social media during the Arab Spring.

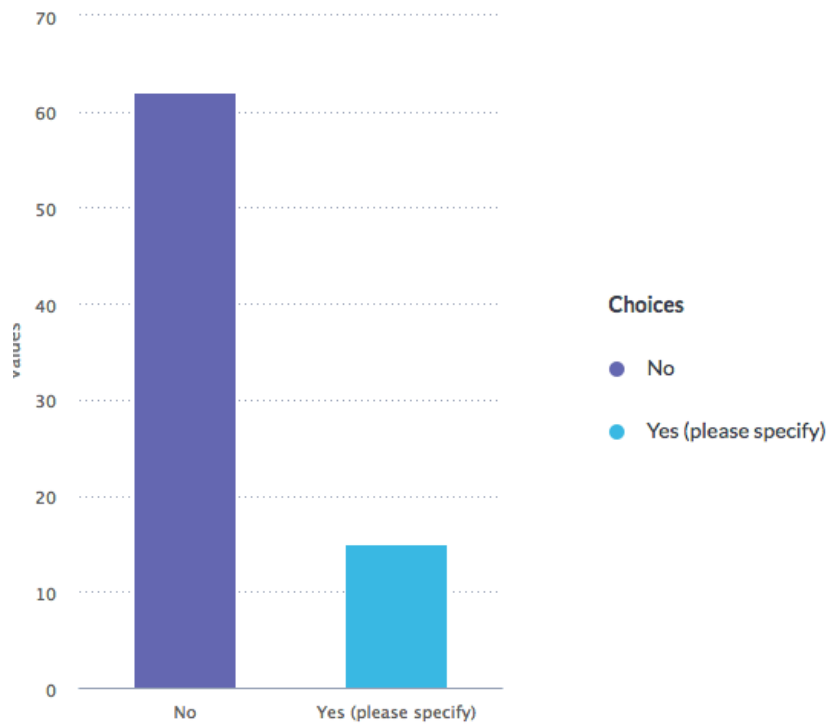


57% of people that used social media during the Arab Spring chose Facebook as their platform of choice, 23% of people used Twitter, and less than 9% used Youtube.

Below is a graph showing the breakdown of social media platforms used. The chart shows that Facebook was the preferred platform for social media. It was and is still is the most widely used social networking site.



The limitations of the research were that everyone surveyed was already on Facebook, though they may not have been during the Arab Spring. It also was exclusive to my list of friends, friend’s friends, and Facebook group members to which I was connected. The demographics of my Facebook page could exclude a population that was more or less influenced by social media during the Arab Spring. As the graph below shows, a majority of participants were not living in an Arab country at the time of the Arab Spring.



## Analysis of Data

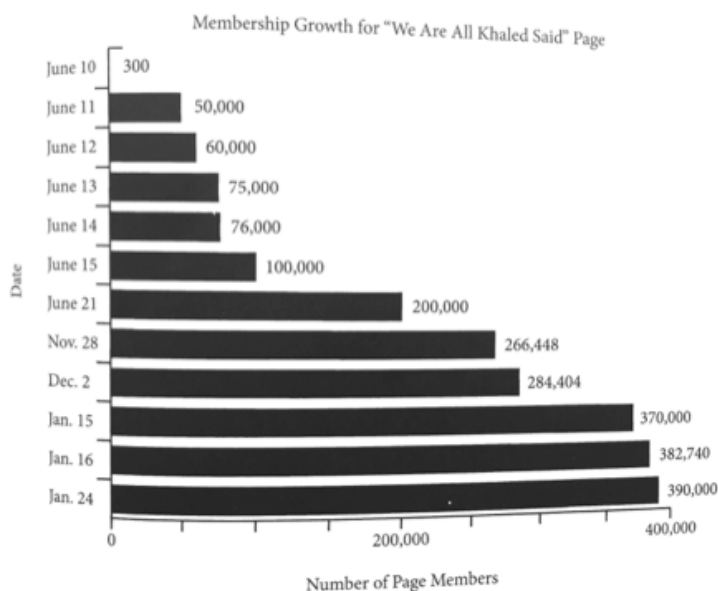
Social Mobilization Theory explains that social movements occur due to political unrest, it also states that the Internet is a tool for low cost, fast communication, and mobilization. (Turner, 2013). The Arab Spring is the perfect example of this theory as it was organized through online efforts. In the case of the Arab Spring, social networking was done via free online platforms, with most participants having access to the internet it was the perfect was to organize a social movement. Even when the government blocked Facebook, activists found a way to contact Facebook directly, and their security team devised a way to protect protestors accounts (Herrera, 2014).

The findings also prove that Social Presence Theory was correct as well. It states the higher the social presence, the larger the influence that communication partners have on each other's behaviors (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In the instance of the Arab Spring, I believe the more people that gathered in Tahrir, the more people wanted to join, it appeared that participants in the demonstrations believed that since more people were protesting in Tahrir, the outcome of

overthrowing the president would be more likely. This created a larger presence on the ground thus creating a larger presence on social media.

The chart to the left shows the growth of the *Kullena Khalded Said* Facebook group.

Between December 2 and



January 15, 85,596 members joined the group which was the second largest jump in membership additions. This is because during that time is when events were unfolding in Tunisia, and other countries that later led to the Arab Spring. The more people that joined the group, the more people knew about it. This why social media is such an effective way for social movements to be organized.

There are some skeptics that deny that the Arab Spring was a ‘Facebook Revolution’ believing that social activism was around before smart phones or social media were around, they also argue that Egypt’s internet was shut down for a matter of days and there were still plenty of protestors and demonstrations happening throughout the country (Gladwell, 2011). However, I argue differently; The Arab Spring was a social movement organized via online platforms. Social networks allowed for observers in other countries to receive real time updates, not just as stories but with images and video. The *Kullena Khaled Said* Facebook group is the perfect example of how the revolution was organized. From November 28 to January 24 there were 123,552 members. That means by the end of January there were 390,000 members in a single online Facebook group. It granted not all members may have been active online or on the group for demonstrations, but that means 390,000 were kept up to date in real time with locations of the protests, where police were, security threats, and areas to avoid.

Social Media use continues to rise, now with over 1.79 billion active users a month, Twitter with 284 million, and 200 million Instagram users (Top 20 Facebook Statistics, 2016). These social media platforms, as well as new ones being launched on a daily basis, provide online communities for users to discuss various topics. Social media continues to grow, as will the social presence on these online communities. One of the other benefits of using social media

for social movements is the allowance of interactions; commenting or sharing a post is a major component of Facebook. Allowing users to comment creates for discussion, which can lead into a better understanding about current events that are happening.

The research conducted answered y main research question: What was the influence of social media in Egypt during the Arab Spring? In addition my data and literature review answer my subquestions: What were the primary social media platforms used? Is social media an effective tool for political discussions? and Would the Arab Spring been possible without social media?

### **Conclusions**

Social media influenced the Arab Spring by creating awareness to the people in Egypt and the rest of the world. The younger generations are more knowledgeable about the Arab Spring and therefore more inclined to have participated. As internet becomes more accessible across the globe, I believe we will start seeing more social movements being arranged via social media.

I would recommend further research be conducted to a larger population of people around the world. I would be curious to see if social media was as influential during the Arab Spring to other populations that may not have been represented in my survey. I would also be interested to look at the influence that new social media platforms such as Instagram and Google + must have on current events, and if older platforms that were used for the Arab Spring are still as influential. I would also recommend interviewing participants to understand more in depth, personal experiences of social media during the Arab Spring.

Egypt is a wonderful place that won my heart over. The literature that I read for my research was emotional, honest, and inspiring. I hope that one day Egypt will be a peaceful nation that tourists begin visiting again. I would like to thank all the people who participated in my research as this could not have been done without each and every one of you.

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## Appendix A: Statement of Consent

By taking this survey I agree to be apart of research conducted on the influence of social media during the Arab Spring. I understand that the information gathered from this survey will be anonymous and used for research purposes only.

The survey will not take more than 10 minutes to complete.

عبر مشاركتي في هذا الاستبيان، فأنا أوافق على أن أكون جزءاً من البحث الذي يتم إجرائه لدراسة تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي خلال الربيع العربي. وأنا اعلم أن المعلومات التي سيتم جمعها من خلال هذا الاستبيان لن يتم الكشف عن هوية مقدميها، وسوف تستخدم لأغراض بحثية فقط. لن يستغرق هذا الاستبيان أكثر من 10 دقائق.

## Appendix B: Survey on the Influence of the Arab Spring

- 1) In which country do you live?
- 2) What is your nationality?
- 3) How old are you?
- 4) What gender do you associate with?
  
- 5) Are you familiar with the Arab Spring?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  
- 6) How did you participate in the events of the Arab Spring (choose all that apply)?
  - a) Followed news outlets
  - b) Followed Social Media
  - c) Posted on social media and or blogs
  - d) Other- please specify
  - e) Did not participate
  
- 7) If you followed the Arab Spring remotely how did you get your information (choose all that apply)?
  - a) Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, other
  - b) News websites
  - c) Word of mouth
  - d) Other, please specify
  
- 8) Did you post on social media during the time of the Arab Spring?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  
- 9) If yes, what forms of social media did you use?
  - a) Facebook
  - b) Twitter
  - c) YouTube
  - d) None of these
  
- 10) Where you living in an Arab country during the Arab Spring?
  - a) No
  - b) Yes: please specify
  
- 11) If you previously answered yes, did you participate in demonstrations or protests happening?
  - a) Yes please explain
  - b) No

## Appendix C: Survey on the Influence of the Arab Spring (Arabic)

- 1) في أي البلدان تعيش؟
  - 2) ما هي جنسيتك؟
  - 3) ما هو عمرك؟
  - 4) ما هو جنسك؟
- ذكر أنني\*
- 5) هل تعلم شيئاً عن الربيع العربي؟
    - 1) نعم
    - 2) لا
  - 6) كيف شاركت في أحداث الربيع العربي؟ (اختر كل الإجابات الصحيحة)
    - 1) تابعت الوكالات الإخبارية
    - 2) تابعت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي
    - 5) ساهمت بالنشر عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أو المدونات
    - 8) أخرى (يرجى التحديد)(هـ) لم أشارك في الربيع العربي
  - 7) إذا كنت من متابعي الربيع العربي عن بعد، أي مصدر استخدمت للحصول على معلوماتك عن الربيع العربي (اختر كل الإجابات الصحيحة)
    - 1) وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي: الفيس بوك، تويتر، اليوتيوب، أخرى
    - 2) المواقع الإلكترونية الحديثة
    - 5) الأخبار المنقولة شفهيًا
    - 8) أخرى (يرجى التحديد)
  - 8) هل قمت بنشر أي آراء أو منشورات على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أثناء الربيع العربي؟
    - 1) نعم
    - 2) لا
  - 9) إذا كانت إجابتك على السؤال السابق بنعم، ما هي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي التي استخدمتها؟
    - 1) فيس بوك
    - 2) تويتر
    - 5) يوتيوب
    - 8) غير ذلك
  - 10) هل كنت تعيش في أحد البلدان العربية أثناء الربيع العربي؟
    - 1) لا
    - 2) نعم (يرجى التحديد)
  - 11) إذا كانت إجابتك على السؤال السابق بنعم، هل قمت بالمشاركة في المظاهرات أو الاحتجاجات التي كانت تحدث آنذاك؟
    - 1) نعم (يرجى التوضيح)
    - 2) لا