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**The Arab Uprising and the Role of Information and
Communication Technologies**

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Abstract

Democracy and freedom of people has always been at the centre of attention of international community as well as an integral part of Human Rights. In this context, Arab revolts in the year of 2011 were a central event. The protests were mainly coordinated and circulated through social media and other communication technologies; this led some observers to call it the “social media revolt”. Indeed, in the era of globalisation, the role of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is growing, and its importance and influence in social movement organisation is more obvious. The revolts in Egypt and Tunisia provide a very interesting area for discussions and research. This study addresses the role of the ICT in the Arab uprisings by identifying the levels of its influence in the course of events.

Contents

Introduction	4
1. Social Movements	8
1.1. Definition	8
1.1. How and Why Revolts are triggered?	9
1.2. Social Movements in Last Two Decades	14
1.3. Activism in the age of the ICT	16
2. The Arab World on the Eve of Change	20
2.1. Media Figures in the Arab World	21
2.2. Media Freedoms	23
2.3. The Internet	24
2.4. Overall	26
3. Political Freedoms	26
3.1. GDP Growth.....	29
3.2. Youth, Unemployment Rates and Poverty.....	29
3.3. Overall.....	31
4. Role of the ICT in the Arab Revolution	34
4.1. Privacy and Anonymity.....	37
4.2. Alternative Information Source & Individual Transformation	39
4.3. Group Networking & Collective Action	43
4.4. Regime Policies.....	45
4.5. External Influence and Attention	50
5. Future via Online	56
Bibliography	62
Appendix	71

To Samir Kassir...

The Spring has never been closer...

Introduction

Bou Azizi was a poor man from a rural area in Tunisia, who despite his university degree was illegally selling vegetables on his chariot in the local bazaar. Even though he used to bribe the police to secure his illegal business, one day he was arrested and prevented from further trade there. His inability to work and support his mother and six sisters, besides the humiliation he faced by the police, were critical. As a response, on the 17 December 2010 he set himself on fire and died few days later. This could have been the whole story but it was not. This incident was so remarkable, that we are still watching its episodes to this very moment.

Since that incident, the year of 2011 has witnessed two major inter-related events that attracted the attention of the world, the “sudden” revolts that occurred in the Arab World¹, and the noteworthy role of the information and communication technologies (ICT) and the social media in these events. The Internet had massively invaded the world especially in the last 10 years, but it has never been so powerful as today. Its influence is in constant

¹ The 22 states of the Arab World (members of the Arab League) are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

increase. The increase in the number of users worldwide and the better service of communication made it easier to connect among the people. The world is becoming an open space. What was thought to be unimaginable twenty years ago is becoming possible and only one-click away nowadays. In order to examine the power of the latest achievements of the technology it is no better than to look at the events going on in the Arab World.

These major events took place in Arab World which since decades lived in non-democratic regimes, with several authoritarian and long lasting military regimes. In fact, this region could be regarded as one of the few that did not witness the third wave of democratisation that began in Portugal in 1974.² The region managed to isolate itself from the global changing and continued in the same cold-war-established regimes. The collapse of these regimes at some point was inevitable but it was unforeseen to take place in such a way as in 2011. The region that has been for a long time far from any radical changes caused by internal social movements (excluding Lebanon in 2005) or external forced changes (like Iraq in 2003), was facing unprecedented revolution lead by people and not by military coups. Regimes that were unbreakable just the night before were falling down in weeks.³ No one could have predicted this would happen in such a way. It did not matter whether the regimes were supported by West like Mubarak's, Ben Ali's or Ali Saleh's, or regarded as enemies like Gaddafi's and Assad's regimes, the people were and still are getting out to the streets to demand for the right to choose their leaders and for human rights respect in order to enjoy a descent life in their countries.

Along these events it was remarkable to observe the daily feedback of the revolutions coming mainly through internet-provided sources. New technologies are playing bigger role in impacting policy and changing the landscape of diplomacy, governance and international relations. Social media and internet became an important limitless resource to connect and inform people, transcending borders and impacting all demographics. It presents a real-time stream of information in which one source can instantaneously

² Huntington, 1991, p. 65.

³ The regimes in Tunisia and Egypt fell down in less than a month.

broadcast to many other sources and stimulate debate on a personal level. These developing communication methods have dramatically changed politics: democratising the flow of information, exponentially increasing awareness and quickly globalising ideas.

Research questions

This study will not focus on the reasons of the revolts except what is relevant to the role of the ICT, since our focus will be on the inter-relation of the ICT and its contribution to the social movement organisation (SMO) applying this to the events of the Arab uprising. The main research question of this study is “How and in what ways did the ICT and social media impact the Arab revolutionary movements?” The Arab revolts provide the great example of this interaction. The study targets Tunisia and Egypt, two of the Arab states that witnessed revolts. These two states provide a good and wide-range model for the role of the ICT. The use of the ICT in the two targeted countries was and still is pretty high, and is extremely worth to be examined.

The research question resulted from the apparent evidence of the high function of the ICT in the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions. This was immediately noticed globally and the media instantly labelled the events as “Twitter Revolution” and/or “Facebook Revolution”. In this context, the issue is worthy to be approached based on the common fact of the intensive role of the ICT. Influence of internet and social media was evident in some previous massive protest organisations (as we will see later), but it was not taking a significant role in an event as such, furthermore taking in consideration the particularity of the states like Egypt and Tunisia. The study argues that to some extent the use of these technologies was the major advantage for the success of the mobilisation of the movements and in reaching a global attention to it. The discussion shows how the ICT not only facilitates several organisational aspects but also creates new levels of influence which are crucial for the movements as well.

Equally, many scholars and authors not only deny the real power of Internet, but also claim that it is a tool for the elite and the way they use it is not in favour of the majority of

the people.⁴ They dispute that the role of technology in these events has been overrated. The common argument is that it was not iPhones and Facebook that marched on Tahrir Square but people with a common identified cause. These scholars believe, revolution is nothing new and the impact of the new technology in the Arab Spring has mostly been reported by the people who were using the technology themselves. Therefore its importance has been exaggerated.⁵

Internet might not be the main factor of the events but it is also wrong to undermine the role of the ICT in the Arab uprisings. The chain of information was impressive. The daily incidents were recorded by the mobile phones. These footages were uploaded on the YouTube and shared by the activists on Facebook. Then it spread to the social networks of the activists reaching the other local and international activists as well as citizens living abroad. These footages were used by the primary satellite televisions like Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, CNN, Euronews, RussiaToday and others. And through the broadcast of these footages on air it reached all other parts of society and the world. For this reason, the role of the ICT in the Arab uprisings is complex and worthy to be researched.

Methodology

The design of this paper is determined by the interdisciplinary approach. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied. The qualitative case study method is an useful tool for developing a deep understanding about a particular case, its features, and its impact. The quantitative method will research the numbers and statistics circulating around the general and specific use of the ICT in the targeted states. In the first part theoretical reflections of the social-political change are introduced in order to explain the grounds of the change in the Arab World. Further, the increasing role of the ICT in the SMO in the last two decades is demonstrated. The first part is closed with the elaboration on the characteristics and the levels of influence of the ICT. In the second and the third parts the

⁴ Morozov, 2011a, p. 34.

⁵ New Internationalist, 'World Development book case study: the role of social networking in the Arab Spring', available at <http://www.newint.org/books/reference/world-development/case-studies/social-networking-in-the-arab-spring/> (consulted on 20 June 2012).

study describes the political and socio-economical conditions of the two states (Egypt and Tunisia), as well as the main media and internet figures, and their conditions in these countries. This is done by analysing mostly secondary sources, in order to examine the consistency of the outcome with the favourable pre-conditions of a revolution. The forth and the main part is devoted to expose the significant events in the Arab uprising as well as some similar evidence from the world related to the role of the ICT and social media. This part is the key part to understand how and in what ways did the ICT impact the Arab revolutionary movements.

It is fair to admit that measuring the impact in this case is and was not an easy matter. It will be always hard to prove that a tool was the reason rather than the driver or maybe it was all in the car itself. However, up to the highest possibilities in reaching the answer, the study tries to reach the most reasonable outcomes which are solidly connected to the analysis of the information gathered during the work. The outcomes probably depend more on the qualitative data which is the perception of the individual itself, whether s/he is an activists/protestor or journalist/observer. But the data which shows that ICT was intensively used is relevant as well. The main aim is to show the effect of the ICT in the latest uprisings, which is not only to prove its absolute power but the vital contribution for organisation of the movements and global attention. Finally the ICTs are in constant development and with every new step there is a new opportunity and challenge, advantage and disadvantage, and it all depends on how people invest these technological innovations.

1. Social Movements

1.1. Definition

McAdam et al. offer a wide-scope understanding of what is a social movement and propose that protest campaigns, interest groups, insurgencies, civil wars, revolutions, institutional politics and social movements are all cut from the same cloth.⁶

⁶ McAdam et al., 2001, p. 6.

Wilson defines social movement as a conscious, collective, organised attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalised means.⁷ Similarly Tilly describes social movements as a series of contentious performances, displays and campaigns by which ordinary people made collective claims on others⁸, whereas Gamson recognises violence as a form of protest.⁹ The many definitions however agree that social movements are a way of collective behaviour that expresses the feelings of the mass of inequality, discrimination, grievances they have against the others and demands they make to the state. There is a wide range of different ways to express these feelings and demands, but when the movement gets to a critical point where no more peaceful action is possible, it transforms into a revolutionary movement.

The revolution is one result of social movements on which the study focuses. It is a mass mobilisation leading to regime change along with a less rapid and fundamental social, economic, and/or cultural change. A revolutionary movement may be defined as that type of social movement which attempts to overthrow and fundamentally transform the state power, and while some movements seek to achieve a societal change others simply seek for state power.¹⁰ In what follows we will approach some of the main explanations of the reasons that lead to a revolution, massive movements and the change of the socio-political spectrum.

1.1. How and Why Revolts are triggered?

The process of social, political and economic change is very complex. Change may involve many different factors, and multiple processes operating concurrently. First, many coincidental, unique or random factors influence the change process. The “trigger” may be population growth, contact with other cultures, technological advances, or changing environmental conditions.¹¹

⁷ Wilson, 1971, p. 8.

⁸ Tilly, 2004, p. 3.

⁹ Gamson, 1975, p. 140.

¹⁰ Goodwin, 2005, p. 405.

¹¹ Appelbaum & Chambliss, 1997, pp. 421-422.

According to Chirot, there are four analytically distinct aspects or subsystems of all human societies: the economy, the political system, social institutions and culture.¹² He explains that the subsystems are inter-related, as the economy interacts directly with the environment. While the decisions about the power determining how the production will be organised and distributed is made by the political system. The latter is the responsible for taking the appropriate action to achieve the goals of the society. The final social subsystem is the culture. It interprets our surroundings for us and gives them meaning, and allows us to express ourselves. Languages, religions, science, art, notions of right and wrong, and explanations of the meaning of life are all parts of the cultural system of a society.¹³

These four distinct aspects shape how people act and live in the political and socio-economic structures in which they live. Thus, social justice is, in part, a matter of ensuring that these structures and institutions do satisfy basic human needs. In some cases, however, society's social institutions are characterised by exploitation, political exclusion, and unequal access to resources.¹⁴ Unjust structural forces and divisions also contribute to discrimination, lack of education, and inadequate employment opportunities.¹⁵ These structural forces often create a system of winners and losers in which people become trapped in a particular social situation. Structural violence in the form of power inequity often leads to poverty and the denial of basic human rights.¹⁶

This structural violence (or the negative sanctions, as some argue) is instinctively more motivating than positive rewards, i.e. threats are central to power. Social movements are more focused on preventing "bads" than securing "goods". In this context studies found that threats stimulate protests possibly more than opportunities do.¹⁷

These threats might raise the question of "State's Legitimacy" which is another important factor in enforcing oppositional movement. It is more likely to witness a rival when the state's legitimacy is weakened. As a counter proof, sometimes even not

¹² Chirot, 2012, p. 129.

¹³ Idem, p. 118.

¹⁴ Ardon, 1999, p. 9.

¹⁵ Dukes, 1999, p. 168.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 159.

¹⁷ Jenkins J. Craig & Form William, 2005, p. 338.

democratic authorities still hold high rate of support from the population. This support is resulted by providing other commodities for the population. For example, the non-democratic regime of Singapore which nonetheless is extremely stable and prosperous, and Russia, where the population prefers the feeling of security, stability and the super power-nation feeling over having a real liberal democratic regime.¹⁸

Generally any of the factors alone is not enough to trigger a revolt; there should be a combination of conditions and events to form a suitable arena for the emission of protests. People do not get out to the streets and gather massively unless some kind of threshold line has been crossed.

According to Davies, the threshold lies in the socio-economical factors. He suggests that a revolutionary crisis occurs when a period of rising economic prosperity suddenly gives way to a disappointment, meaning that when the gap between the socio-economical expectations and the reality becomes unacceptable, the people tend to revolt. Davies' J-curve illustrates his revolution theory which challenges the commonly held view that "misery breeds revolt" by arguing that not all oppressions stir revolts. Instead, he posits that revolutions are caused not by absolute but by relative deprivation. (See in appendix. Table D).

While Tilly pointed out that Davies' theory does not explain how and why different groups mobilise to achieve change, he distinguished four components of collective action: the organisation, mobilisation of resources, common interests, and opportunity. Collective action is a means of mobilising group resources when people have no institutionalised means of making their voices heard, or when their voices are repressed by government.¹⁹

Whereas structural approaches like resource mobilisation theory and political process theory explore how characteristics of the social and political context determine opportunities or constraints for protests, they include the components Tilly has mentioned. Harper and Leicht note that the resource mobilisation theory makes it clear that both, the availability of resources and actors' efficacy in using them effectively, are essential. It

¹⁸ Idem, p. 106.

¹⁹ Tilly, 1977, pp. 10 - 11.

stresses the ability of the movement's members to acquire resources and to mobilise people towards accomplishing the movement's goals.²⁰ In contrast to the traditional collective behaviour theory that views social movements as deviant and irrational, resource mobilisation sees them as rational social institutions, created and populated by social actors with a goal of taking a political action. It attempts to explain social movements by viewing individuals as rational actors that are engaged in instrumental actions that use formal organisations to secure resources and foster mobilisation.²¹

On one hand, the political process theory suggests that people decide to get out on the streets when they feel they do not have any other mean of expressing themselves. Johnston explains that if the institutional channels of the political participation exist, available to be accessed and present a possibility for the people to influence the political decision, they will choose to fight for their rights through these low cost methods where they do not have to be jailed, threatened, injured or even killed. On the other hand, if such channels are not available in the state system and the political opportunities are closed, then the groups are forced to act from outside the institutional channels and go to protest. The political repression of the groups and the absence of the alternatives push the mass in one way or another to occupy the streets in demand for their rights and freedoms.²²

As Tilly noted, organisation and common interests are important for collective action. The structure of civil society – the organisational network of public life – plays a crucial role as a functional network of people that are organised and united over their common interests. Lofton believes that this pre-existing mobilisation structures and networks influence how other mobilisation processes are performed.²³ Additionally, Oberschall indicates that strong internal group ties reduce the cost of mobilisation and increase the probability that the group as a whole can be mobilised to action.²⁴ Within the rational

²⁰ Harper & Leicht, 2007, p. 148.

²¹ Ferree, 1992, p. 30.

²² Johnston, 2011, p. 36.

²³ Idem, p. 55.

²⁴ Idem, p. 56.

choice framework, this strong internal network is very helpful to assume that most of the people and most of the time make similar perceptions of costs and benefits.

An important core of revolutions is the oppositional thoughts and ideas. The circulation of these views in the repressive regimes is almost impossible. However, sometimes with the intention of regimes or without it, they allow for different thoughts to be expressed in particular places. Johnston calls these places “free spaces”, which are the places in the suppressive regime where you can still express your opinion either because the regime leaves it this way or because it cannot reach there.²⁵ Similar to what the kitchen represented for the soviet citizens, where they gathered for a more open talk, in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries the main “free space” was the cyberspace, where people could express their opinions more freely, thus avoiding the repressive organs of the state. The free spaces usually generate protesting speech which means that in this margin of possibilities (free spaces) the society networks starts to produce a core of oppositional circumstances, which later could turn into the centre of the oppositional movement on the macro-level.

A different approach is conceded by Taleb and Blyth, who sum up the whole question of “Why” by relating it to the bi-level human life structure, “Humans simultaneously inhabit two systems: the linear and the complex. The linear domain is characterised by its predictability and the low degree of interaction among its components, which allows the use of mathematical methods that make forecasts reliable. In complex systems, there is an absence of visible causal links between the elements, masking a high degree of interdependence and extremely low predictability”.²⁶

In the last two decades SMO started to benefit from the new technological innovations such as internet and mobile phones. Even though the core of the movements has not changed, in a way it is still based on the people protests, demands, gatherings and formation of a pressure power. But the main aspect of our lives in the era of globalisation and the ICTs has changed, therefore, the social movements are not the same.

²⁵ Idem, p. 113.

²⁶ Taleb & Blyth, 2011, p. 36.

There are several important factors to trigger a revolt including political, socio-economical, cultural and other variables that constitutes the societal preconditions in providing a suitable ground for a revolution. In the next chapter will be demonstrated several examples from the last two decades showing how the ICTs are facilitating the organisation of social movements.

1.2. Social Movements in Last Two Decades

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, almost every year has witnessed a critical social revolt or uprising. With globalisation, the movements are moving from being a local event into the main global attraction. The individuals and societies are more and more connected, forming not only local networks but regional and global as well. The development of the ICT has created additional weapons for protestors to use in achieving their goals. A brief review of social movements that had actively used the ICT in their organizational aims and action planning in the last two decades is displayed below.

On 1 January 1994 the Zapatistas uprising occurred in Mexico and gathered a worldwide attention through the use of internet. In 2000 the Serbian “Otpor” movement against the socialist regime of Slobodan Milošević was famous for having a website for recruitment and political outreach even before it had an office.²⁷

The internet and digital media played an important role in facilitating the organisation and coverage of the transnational, multi-issue protests during the 3rd World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference held in Seattle in 1999, which is often cited as the start of the anti-globalisation cause. The internet networked local non-governmental organisations, citizens, and grass-roots activists into a global, transnational network by facilitating new channels for action, and discourse of public policies.²⁸

On 17 January 2001, during the impeachment trial of Philippine President Joseph Estrada, loyalists in the Philippine Congress voted to set aside key evidence against him.

²⁷ Manrique & Mikail, 2011, p. 2.

²⁸ Globalise this - New Media for Peace website, ‘1999: New Media Revolution in Seattle’, 6 October 2009, available at <http://globalisethis.wordpress.com/2009/10/06/1999-new-media-revolution-in-seattle/> (consulted on 2 July 2012).

Less than two hours after the decision was announced, thousands of Filipinos, angry that their corrupt president might escape the charges, converged on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, a major crossroad in Manila. The protest was arranged, in part, by forwarded text messages “Go 2 EDSA. Wear blk”. The crowd quickly swelled, and in the next few days over a million of people arrived, causing traffic in downtown Manila. People gathered so massively and so quickly that the pressure was extremely high in deciding Estrada’s fate.²⁹

However, the efforts of the protestors even with the help of the ICTs were not always getting to happy-end. The post-Soviet space has witnessed several massive protests where internet has been used to help organising the protests, like in Belarus after the elections of 2006 and 2010, where the movement eventually weakened, leaving Lukashenko more determined than ever to control social media. Same could be said about the famous Iranian Green opposition movement that started after the announcement of the presidential elections results in 2009. It was essentially mobilised over Twitter and turned the cyberspace into a battle field with the authorities, but also ended up with the crash of opposition by the regimes’ forces.

The use of the latest means of communication by the social movements includes not only propaganda and spread of information, but also means better, easier and more effective coordination. In this political realm, social media proved useful to the election campaign of President Obama, beginning on Facebook in February 2007. Social media was used to raise campaign funds, build a relationship with voters, and provide immediate feedback. A team of staff members worked to provide prompt feedback and rapid updates.³⁰

This quick review of the latest social movements in the past two decades shows that the world’s population is in constant change. The placards change, but movements remain. However, they do not remain in the same manner as half a century ago. The present high technological and informational development has also changed the means of protest organisation or the SMO. We are now in the era of “Web-Activism”, “online-movements”

²⁹ Shirky, 2011, p. 28.

³⁰ Kenna, 2011.

and “digital social change”. Social movements, as we mentioned in the examples above, are using the technological innovations in their favour, to maintain its momentum on the ground.

This research targets only one aspect of the effect of technology on the SMOs, that is, the “offline movements” rather than the “online movements”, which are fully organised on the internet like the “online petitions” and email circulations. In the next chapter the research introduces the ICT as the new-old player in the process of change. While the ICT solely cannot achieve much, it is an effective tool in SMO.

1.3. Activism in the age of the ICT

The new technologies are being actively used in the last two decades in the process of SMO. This is due to the several characteristics of the ICTs that provide additional power to the movement which would increase the visibility of the revolution and thus change its organisational process. Therefore, there is no doubt that the ICTs are becoming one of the most indispensable tools for the social movements, and there will be a large number of researches on this issue in the coming years. The society is turning into a new form of communications and organisation. The protests are turning to the phase of E-mobilisation or E-movements, creating a global network which Burbach sees as a reflection of the civil society itself referring to these movements as the postmodern social movements that “arose from its internet communiqués and its adroit use of the media”.³¹

The development of the ICT led to the massive impact on our daily life not only on the individual level but on the whole society as well, causing the change on the structural level of the society and to the formation of the “network society”. As Van Dijk explains, the interrelation of processes and the growing role of media networks give rise to a new type of society replacing what has been called as “mass society”. The best name for this new type is “network society”. The communities moved to a larger-scale of social networks which are more diffuse of the traditional ones.³² This was accompanied with a different means of

³¹ Burbach, 2001, p. 116.

³² Van Dijk, 2006, p. 34.

networking and communications, which developed from face to face interaction into mainly networking through the Social Media Sites and the ICTs. This eliminated the traditional media as an intermediary and allowed organisers not only to communicate directly with their audience but also to have interactive discussions.

Van Dijk elaborates on the concept of the network society and the qualities of the network itself. He states that “the network society concept emphasises the form and organisation of information processing and exchange. An infrastructure of social and media networks takes care of this”. So the network society can be defined as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organisation at all levels (individual, group, organisational and societal). Increasingly, these networks link all units or parts of this formation (individuals, groups and organisations).³³

The network is an “unlimited space” which can contain millions and billions of users in contact with each other in sub groups. The “elastic size” of the network decreases the control but does not stop it. Despite of that, it definitely gives the individual more chances than offline. The networks are functioning not only on the local or national level, but spreading regionally and globally as well. Van Dijk states that “Social networks supported by media networks are available at all levels and subsystems of society. Four levels can be distinguished: individual, organisational, social and finally global relations. These levels are connected with each other by networks”.³⁴

Globalisation, the progress of the technologies, spread of internet, social media and therefore formation of the networks has affected the process of SMO, drawing a new dimension and giving the internet as well as to the communication devices a bigger role and a higher importance, which pushed some research on web-activism to suggest that the use of digital technology in activism will require major revisions of (pre-digital) social movement theories.³⁵

³³ Idem, p. 20.

³⁴ Van Dijk, 2006, p. 25.

³⁵ Earl & Kimport, 2011, p. 197.

The continuum of online activism is classified by Earl and Kimport into three different categories, E-mobilisation, E-tactics and E-movements. The first one is where the web used to facilitate the sharing of information in the service of an offline protest action. E-tactics, on the other hand, might include both off- and online components, although largely are low cost and do not rely on co-presence of participants or organisers, like the online petitions. In E-movements, the organisation and participation occur entirely online.³⁶

Earl and Kimport also indentified two major schools of thoughts that study protests and the ICTs. The first one is described as “supersize effects” and the latter as “theory 2.0 effects.” “Supersize effects” theories argue that the ICTs reduce mobilisation costs allowing activists to mobilise more people and do not find that the ICT usage in any way changes the process of activism, although it changes the scale at which activism take place by adding new audience, increasing the reach and speed of messaging, and reducing the costs. While “theory 2.0” argues that, leveraged correctly the ICTs change how activism is and can be done in fundamental ways. Innovative uses of the web can lead to changes in the underlying theoretical process that drive activism, in a sense that the engine driving protest would look and operate differently than it has before.³⁷ It is not the technologies that inevitably lead to specific social or political changes, but it is rather the way the use of the ICT by people in a simple or innovative way that leads to different kind of political and social changes.³⁸

Additionally, Earl and Kimport introduced the notion of affordances through what they called a “leveraged affordances” approach or the fully utilising capacities of digital tools.³⁹ The idea of leveraged affordances reflects the necessity of activists to use the ICTs in innovative ways in order to take advantage of their affordances. The ICTs afford new forms of mobilisation and tactics to the skilled and creative, so when leveraged effectively, new kinds of movements may emerge.

³⁶ Idem, p. 12.

³⁷ Idem, p. 27.

³⁸ Idem, p. 31.

³⁹ The term “Affordance” was created by James Gibson, (*The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1979, p. 127) and later imported into the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) to describe the possible types of actions that are enabled by a particular technology.

Earl and Kimport detected two main affordances. The first one is fundamentally about start-up and scaling costs. The Web can allow communication, coordination, and information sharing at very low initial costs. And the second major affordance of the Web is that it allows coordination action toward a common goal without co-presence in physical time and space.⁴⁰ Hence, we can argue that the ICT has not only changed the “processes” of activism but also the “scale” of it, especially if affordance was leveraged as highly as possible.

We notice that the main characteristics of the ICT are the speed, geographical and social reach, high storage capacity, accuracy and the relatively low cost of usage. These characteristics of the ICT are at great value for the SMO, especially if their affordance is highly leveraged. By doing so, these qualities of the ICT generate several levels of influence - on the process of organisation and action - that can be distinguished. While these levels are complex, interrelated, and difficult to research empirically, when applied to concrete cases, they provide a useful framework. The study adopted - with some modifications - the main levels of influence which were identified by the United Nations study of the New Media on the Arab revolution.⁴¹

Privacy and Anonymity: Individuals’ ability to hide their identity in real life in case of potential threat is minimal. Even though it is not a necessity in the open democratic society, privacy and anonymity is extremely vital for activists in the authoritarian regimes where an opinion could cost a high price up to losing one’s life.

Alternative Information Source and Individual Transformation: New media through its role as alternative informational channel can affect politics by bringing the individual straight into action. Individual transformation occurs when a person is exposed to materials that are strong in their content and which are usually restricted in the official broadcasting channels.

Group Networking and Collective Action: The ICT is an effective tool for local or global level coordination whether among the people or social movement groups, and in a very fast

⁴⁰ Earl & Kimport, 2011, p. 10.

⁴¹ Aday et al., 2010, p. 11.

and cheap way. For this reason, it is highly effective in organising a collective action, in other words, helping mobilising the masses into action.

Regime Policies: New media can help established regimes to maintain their power in various ways, such as through censorship or counter-propaganda.

External influence and Attention: Information about a movement such as its ideology and goals can be transmitted to a wide audience, both domestically and internationally. This can happen in the form of manifestos, statements, demands, images or videos on web sites or social networking services. As a consequence, political sympathy or hostility from outside actors can be mobilised.⁴²

2. The Arab World on the Eve of Change

One of the earliest persons mentioning the term “Arab Spring” was the brilliant Lebanese Journalist Samir Kassir. He was a prominent left-wing activist, a strong advocate of freedom for the Palestinians, democracy in Lebanon and Syria and a vocal critic of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. His views almost realised during his life and precisely in 2005 with the uprising of Lebanese People demanding liberties and independence from the Syrian control.

The year of 2005 witnessed several events in the Arab world that promoted the term of “Arab Spring”. Cook describes the image, “Iraqis went to the polls for the first time since the demise of Saddam Hussein, Syria withdrew from Lebanon after one million protesters demonstrated in central Beirut, and Saudi Arabia staged municipal elections. In Cairo, activists from across the political spectrum, having grown more confident and savvy, forced the regime of President Hosni Mubarak to cast itself as reform-minded, which loosened the reins on the opposition. The editorial pages of Western newspapers were asking triumphantly if the Middle East had finally arrived at that mythic tipping point.”⁴³

Although the few apparent changes in 2005 had a positive impact in each country, the “Arab Spring” was not evident. Even in Lebanon where the biggest protests took place, the

⁴² Sabadello, 2011.

⁴³ Cook, 2009, p. 124.

“Spring” stumbled. Nevertheless, a new element was being observed to become more popular in the hands of people at that time already. Hofheinz was among the first to foresee, the great role of what he called “the new media” - satellite television, mobile phones, the Internet - in the “Democratic” future of the Arab World, seeing it as a main tool in undermining governments’ hegemonic control over the flow of information.⁴⁴

In order to try to understand the events of the Arab revolution we must take a closer look at some main critical aspects on the Arab states, including the relevance of the factors that were stated in the first chapter. In the following chapter the study analyses the number of users of the ICT to build relation between numbers and the role played by the ICTs during these events Furthermore, it shows the political and socio-economic conditions that existed before the escalation of the movements, in order to determine their possible role as catalysts of the movements.

2.1. Media Figures in the Arab World

In the era of globalisation, the internet and other communication devices have spread to every part of the world, making it easier and cheaper to send and receive information. The Arab World was not exclusion. However, the authoritarian regimes were very concerned to control all kinds of media in order to limit the “unfriendly” use of it. The figures below show the condition of media in Tunisia and Egypt.

Three main social media sites that played a role in the events of the Arab revolution are YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share videos. It provides a forum for people to connect, inform and inspire others across the globe and it acts as a distribution platform for original-content creators and advertisers, large and small.⁴⁵ Twitter is a real-time information network launched in 2006, that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news through small bursts of information called tweets where each tweet is composed of no more

⁴⁴ Hofheinz, 2005, p. 78.

⁴⁵ YouTube official website, in About YouTube, available at http://www.youtube.com/t/about_youtube (consulted on 9 June 2012).

than 140 characters.⁴⁶ Additionally, tweets can be categorised using “hashtag” which “group posts together by topic or type”. Finally, the most popular social networking service of our times is Facebook a website that was launched in February 2004. As of May 2012, Facebook has over 900 million active users, more than half of them using mobile devices. Its mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.⁴⁷ According to Alexa site ranking list, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are ranked the 2nd, 3rd and 8th busiest websites in the world as of June 2012.⁴⁸

The figures and facts about the media and internet in Arab World show how many people are accessed online and possess a mobile phone. As well, they show the number of the condition of the media freedoms, including press and internet.

Censorship probably is the main concern of the oppositional activists and the human rights defenders as well, and precisely not only whether the censorship exists but rather what type of censorship is it. Several Arab states that practice censorship have very different approaches which regulate what kind of sites and activities contain the highest risks for the system or the society according to the ideology of the regime.⁴⁹

Noticeably, in the countries where the restrictions are high on the public debate including cyberspace, the people search for the minimum available spaces, mainly on the internet, where users try in different ways to overcome the firewalls and blockage of sites to express their opinions. Hofheinz argues that, “Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Tunisia exercise the most heavy-handed control of Internet traffic in the region, but even – or perhaps especially

⁴⁶ Twitter official website, in About Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/about> (consulted on 9 June 2012).

⁴⁷ Facebook official website, in About Facebook, available at <http://www.facebook.com/facebook/info> (consulted on 9 June 2012).

⁴⁸ Alexa website, Top global site ranking, available at <http://www.alexa.com/company> (consulted on 9 June 2012).

⁴⁹ Various methods are used. Filtering and banning of certain sites deemed inappropriate for moral or political reasons is common in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Jordan have decreased filtering, focusing on a few political opposition sites. Qatar filters only what it deems pornographic. Unfiltered access is available in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Kuwait. – Hofheinz, 2005, p. 79, available at http://www.fes.de/ipg/arc_05_set/set_03_05e.htm (consulted on 20 June 2012).

– in these countries, the net has proven to be a vital factor in opening windows and expanding the realm of what can be said in public.”⁵⁰

2.2. Media Freedoms

Reporters without Borders publish an annual ranking of countries to assess the press freedom records. States are ranked according to their scores where the lowest score in the index corresponds to greater freedom of the press. In 2010, the report showed that Tunisia and Egypt had ranked 164 and 127 respectively out of 179 states in total.⁵¹ “Freedom of Press index” of 2011 by Freedom House confirms these numbers. The report gives score to the press freedom status on a scale from 1 (most free) to 100 (least free). Depending on the ratings, the nations are then classified as “Free”, “Partly Free”, or “Not Free”. Noticeably, among Arab states only Lebanon, Kuwait and Comoros Islands were classified as “partly free” countries. The vast majority of the Arabic states were classified as “Not Free”. According to Freedom House, “Not Free” country is where basic political rights are absent, and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied. In the report of 2011 which corresponds to the situation in 2010, Tunisia and Egypt scored 85 and 65, and ranked 184th, 146th respectively among 197 states and territories.⁵²

The Freedom House report of 2011 stated that, although majority of the press in Tunisia is privately owned it was subject to pressures from the government. Many foreign satellite television stations could be viewed in Tunisia, though it has been known that the government blocked transmissions from time to time. While in Egypt the press freedoms conditions was slightly better, with more than 500 publications exist, however the majority of print outlets were still in the hands of the state. Editors of Egypt’s three largest newspapers, *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar*, and *Al-Gomhorya*, were appointed by the president. Print media production and distribution was also controlled by the state. All local television broadcasters—two national and six regional—were owned and operated by the

⁵⁰ Hofheinz, 2005, p. 80.

⁵¹ Reporters without Borders, ‘Press Freedom Index’, 2010 Report, available at http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=classement&id_rubrique=1034 (consulted on 19 April 2012).

⁵² Freedom House, ‘Freedom of Press’, 2011 Report, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2011> (consulted on 19 April 2012).

government. There were, however, four privately owned, independent satellite channels and several pan-Arab stations that attracted wide viewership. The government supported state media directly and through advertising subsidies, and independent media face significant financial challenges.⁵³

The prosecution of journalists especially with the emergence law in act was very common. In 2007, an Egyptian court sentenced Ibrahim Isa, editor of the *Al-Dustour* newspaper, to six months in prison for publishing an article about the health of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The court explained its verdict by saying that the reports had harmed Egypt's interests and had led to a sharp drop in the stock exchange, frightened away foreign investors, and caused \$350 million in damage.⁵⁴

2.3. The Internet

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all people have the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Probably this definition in our days means the right to be connected to the internet and having free access to the information provided online.

In the end of 2010, the average percentage of internet users in the Arab World was about 35 percent. Tunisia and Egypt had 37 percent and 27 percent respectively of their population connected among them 75 percent were youth (19-30 years old).⁵⁵ While Facebook, Google, YouTube ranked in the first five among the most visited sites, Twitter came in rank 15.⁵⁶ The total number of Facebook users in the Arab world as of November 2011 was at 36,016,664 users rising from 21,377,282 users as of January 5, 2011, having

⁵³ Idem.

⁵⁴ El Deeb, Sahar, 'Ibrahim Eissa, Egyptian Journalist, Gets Jail Time for Reports On Mubarak', *Huff Post Media*, 28 September 2008, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/28/ibrahim-eissa-egyptian-journalist_130042.html (consulted on 12 September 2012).

⁵⁵ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), ICT Adoption and Prospects in the Arab Region, 2012, available at http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-AR-2012-PDF-E.pdf (consulted on 19 April 2012) & Dubai School of government, 'The Role of Social Media in Arab Women's Empowerment', p. 12, in Arab Social Media Report, vol. 1 № 3, November 2011, available at <http://www.dsg.fohmics.net/en/asmr3/> (consulted on 19 June 2012).

⁵⁶ Alexa website, Top sites by country, available at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries> (consulted on 19 April 2012).

almost doubled in a year (19,945,487 in November 2010). Among these users, the youth (between the ages of 15 and 29) made up about 75 percent of the users, a number that has been holding steady since April 2011.⁵⁷ (See appendix. Table J).

By the end of 2010, Egypt had 87.1 percent of its population using mobile phones while Tunisia overcame Egypt with 106 percent of its population using mobile phones, making mobiles one of the most important means of communication and information exchange.⁵⁸

On the condition of freedom of internet, Freedom House reports that, “the government in Tunisia held total control over the cyberspace and the internet cafés were state run and operated under police surveillance; customers had to register their names and other personal information before accessing the internet. Social-networking and video-sharing sites, including YouTube, and Facebook, were routinely blocked by the government. The Tunisia Monitoring Group of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange reported in June 2010 that at least 30 websites covering news, politics, and human rights issues were blocked within Tunisia. The government reportedly monitored internet telephony and e-mail communications. Punishments for online dissidents were similar to those for print and broadcast journalists who publish information that the government deems objectionable. Journalists who had turned to internet media frequently faced police surveillance and other forms of intimidation for expressing critical views”.⁵⁹ While Egyptian authorities did not filter internet access, the government was able to repress internet activism using the Emergency Law.

Both regimes in Egypt and Tunisia imposed arbitrary surveillance, dismissal from employment, and imprisonment. All critics were subjected to overt and oppressive surveillance, and their phone and internet connections were disrupted or cut. The authorities blocked websites and maintained control on freedom of expression and the media.

⁵⁷ Dubai School of Government, 2011c, p. 12 available at <http://www.dsg.fohmics.net/en/asmr3/> (consulted on 19 June 2012).

⁵⁸ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), ICT Adoption and Prospects in the Arab Region, 2012, available at http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-AR-2012-PDF-E.pdf (consulted on 20 April 2012).

⁵⁹ Freedom House, ‘Freedom of Press in Tunisia’, 2011 Report, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2011/tunisia> (consulted on 19 April 2012).

Journalists and bloggers who criticised the government were harassed, including arrest and prosecution because of defamation charges. Books and foreign newspapers were censored if they commented on issues that the government considered taboo or a threat to national security.

2.4. Overall

The reports and numbers clearly show the heavy censorship of Tunisian government over everything related to the flow of information, whether audible, visible or printable media. Several internet sites were frequently blocked and under constant surveillance of the authorities, except the pro-governmental media and press which was allowed to breakthrough. Egyptian authorities had less control over the internet and television broadcast than their counterparts in Tunisia, yet the situation was not pleasant since the Egyptian government controlled other key aspects of the freedom of expression besides the high number of trials against journalist/activists. Moreover, at anytime, it could introduce a new control law based on the emergency law which is in power since three decades.

3. Political Freedoms

In the “freedom in the world” index, Freedom House attempts to measure the democracy and political freedoms in the world by rating the levels of political rights and civil liberties in each state and territory from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free) and categorising the outcome into three main types (free, partly free and not free). This index showed that Arab World lacks freedoms and practice of democracy. According to 2010 report - one year before the uprisings - only 4 out of 22 Arabic States were classified as partly free i.e. Morocco, Kuwait, Comoros Islands and Lebanon. Keeping in mind that 76 percent of the world’s nations were either free or partly free, leads to conclusion that the vast majority of Arab states including Egypt and Tunisia were among the only 48 non-free states out of which they make up more than one third.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World’, 2010 Report, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2010> (consulted on 18 April 2012).

Similarly, “The Economist Intelligence Unit’s index of democracy” classifies countries into Full democracy, Flawed democracy, Hybrid Regimes and Authoritarian regimes. It showed that till 2010 Arabs did not have any democratic regime and only three countries were classified as hybrid regime (Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq),⁶¹ i.e. Arab states made up one third of all authoritarian regimes (19 out of 55).⁶² Moreover, “Polity IV index” for 2011 complies with the above classifications stating that only Lebanon and Comoros Islands were classified democratic states while the rest of the Arab states were and autocracies.⁶³

On the situation in Tunisia, Amnesty International reports, “in the period prior to the revolution in Tunisia there was regular suppression of people who criticised the government or exposed official corruption or human rights violations. They faced harassment, intimidation and physical assault by state security officers. Human rights defenders were harassed with oppressive surveillance, threats and assaults. Often, they were physically prevented from attending meetings or gatherings where human rights were to be discussed”.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the Egyptian regime continued to use the state of emergency powers to detain peaceful critics and opponents, many were held under administrative detention orders; others were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials before military courts.⁶⁵ In June 2010, there was a very significant incident in Egypt that certainly triggered the coming revolts. The brutal torture and death of the 28 years old cyber-activist Mohammad Khalid Saïid who has been captured by the security after posting

⁶¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy index, 2010 Report, available at http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf (consulted on 18 April 2012).

⁶² The Economist Intelligence Unit defines ‘Authoritarian regimes’ as: “states where political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed. Many countries in this category are outright dictatorships. Some formal institutions of democracy may exist, but these have little substance. Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair. There is disregard for abuses and infringements of civil liberties. Media are typically state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. There is repression of criticism of the government and pervasive censorship. There is no independent judiciary.”

⁶³ Polity IV project, Regimes by Type, 2011, available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> (consulted on 20 June 2012).

⁶⁴ Amnesty International, ‘International Report – Tunisia’, 2010, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/tunisia/report-2010> (consulted on: 18 April 2012).

⁶⁵ Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World - Egypt’, 2011 Report, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/egypt> (consulted on 4 July 2012).

on internet the video of two local policemen sharing the bounty of a drug bust. This incident will be marked later as the very early beginning of the protest movement.

The extremely low rates of democracy and freedom are remarkable, Arabic states severely lack the practice of democracy. Arab rulers and especially those of the revolting states have been in power since decades and almost all came to power after a military coup. The police regime in Tunisia headed by Zine el Abidine Ben Ali ruled from 1987 till 2011. The regime in Egypt headed by President Mubarak was in power from 1981 till 2011 while the regime itself existed from 1952. Syria's is ruled by the Assad family since 1970 while the one-party system lead by Baath party is in power since 1963. Gaddafi the powerful ruler of Libya holds the absolute record of 42 years in power since 1962. And Ali Abdullah Saleh was in presidency of North Yemen from 1978 till 1990 and from the unification till 2012.

The relatively long years in power compared to the average presidential term in democracies are a clear proof of the disconnection from the global tendency of democratisation. But this tiny aspect of the political realm is only the tip of the iceberg. Not only these states were ruled long by a dictator, they also suffered from lack of other normal levels of living, like prosperous economy and a well functioning social security system. There was and probably still is a large aspect of corruption, high number of unemployment and regular suppression of opposition.

The Arabic authoritarian regimes allowed political competition and pluralism only within rules and parameters carefully drawn to ensure that the opponents of the regime are in disadvantaged and disempowered. Egypt may have amended its constitution to permit multiple candidates in presidential elections but followed it with a law limiting this right to existing parties. This limited "free space" existed only to badly masquerade the actual dictatorship. Tunisia and Egypt had several satellite parties that never acted as a real opposition to the ruling party, the dissident were often sent to jail or exile when they tried to criticise the government or express their thoughts.

In 2005, Mubarak agreed to allow a contested presidential election and then more transparent legislative elections, But the presidential "contest" was still grossly unfair, and

within three months of the vote (which official figures claim was won by the incumbent with 88.6 percent) Mubarak's opponent, Ayman Nour, was sentenced to five years in prison.

3.1. GDP Growth

On the contrary of the political situation, Egyptian and Tunisian economy were doing relatively well. Although there was an absence of freedoms and free political life, there was stability and the economy was in growth, however, it was not reflected on ground. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank reports showed that both Tunisia and Egypt had an impressive growth rates especially during the latest global economic crisis with an average annual growth of approximately 5 percent between 2004 and 2010 (3 to 6 percent in Tunisia and 4 to 7 percent in Egypt).⁶⁶ Despite this growth, statistics confirmed that one of the main motivations for the uprising in Tunisia was the fact that many were excluded from the benefits of the economical growth. On the other side, this growth enabled the ruling elites to have plenty of money to pay their security and enforcement structures, and feel no shortage of patronage to hand out to top civilian and security officials.

3.2. Youth, Unemployment Rates and Poverty

After the fall of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia it turned out that the growth rates, numbers and statistics, which used to be announced by the former government, were not the actual rates. The new transitional government declared that the real growth rates, which were supposed to be positive nonetheless, were not reflected in reality. Which means the positive effect of the growth was in the hand of the elite while the majority of population was excluded from the benefits. This is proved by the high rate of unemployment among youth and the significant percentage of population living in poverty. World Bank reports, "Previously, official poverty numbers reported a national poverty rate of 3.8 percent in 2005. Following the revolution, however, in September 2011 the National Statistics

⁶⁶ World Bank, 'Tunisia Overview Report', 2011, available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/overview>. International Monetary Fund (IMF), 'World Economic Outlook', April 2012, available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/01/weodata/weoselgr.aspx> (both consulted on 19 June 2012).

Institute published revised poverty estimates which show that the national average poverty rate in 2005 was 11.8 percent. Furthermore, the breakdown by region showed that national averages hid large variations, with poverty rates as low as 5-7 percent in the Centre-east and Grand Tunis region and as high as 29 percent in the Centre-west of the country.”⁶⁷ The same goes for the unemployment rates, especially among the young and educated. In 2010, unemployment was estimated at 13 percent overall (approximately 500,000 to 750,000 people) but it was at 30.7 percent for young people (15-24 years old), and with rates now reaching as high as 44 percent for young university graduates (15-29 years old).⁶⁸

Egyptian population with around 80 million people was suffering as well from the high rates of unemployment that reached around 9.2 percent in 2010 (approximately 7.2 million people),⁶⁹ but it was around 30 percent among the youth (15-24 years old) which constituted around 90 percent of the whole unemployment rates,⁷⁰ while 22 percent of the Egyptian population were still living below the national poverty line. This figure went up to 43.7 percent in rural Upper Egypt – and an additional 20 percent of the population has experienced poverty at one point during the last decade.⁷¹

Young people arguably have the most at stake in the outcome of this revolution. The results have immediate impact and future implications in how they will live their lives. Joel Beinin has calculated that the last decade witnessed more than three-thousand labour protests in Egypt related to the massive discontent with the ruling of the Mubarak’s regime.⁷² Analysis has shown that in Egypt, unemployment is highest amongst university

⁶⁷ World Bank, ‘Tunisia Overview Report’, 2011 available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/overview> (consulted on 9 April 2012).

⁶⁸ Idem.

⁶⁹ International Monetary Fund, ‘World Economic Outlook Database’, April 2011, available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/01/weodata/weoselgr.aspx> (consulted on 19 June 2012).

⁷⁰ Assad & Roudi-Fahimi, 2007, p. 3, available at <http://www.prb.org/About/InternationalPrograms/Projects-Programs/MENA.aspx> (consulted on 8 June 2012).

⁷¹ World Bank, ‘Egypt Overview Report’, 2011, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt/overview> (consulted on 9 April 2012).

⁷² Masoud, 2011, p. 21.

graduates, a group that is growing quickly and is also the most dependent upon the government for employment.⁷³

3.3. Overall

While the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia represents the main religious centre of the Arab World, the Egypt definitely represents the nationalist Arab dimension. For a long time the Nasserite movement was regarded as the compass of the nationalist thoughts among the Arabs, but this was in 20th century. In the 21st century Egypt is facing difficulties on every level, from the above mentioned political level and the suppression of the opposition (the Muslim Brotherhood and independent activists), and the bad socio-economical conditions, to the religious tension among Muslims and the large Christian Coptic population (estimated around 8 million out of 80 million Egyptians in total)⁷⁴.

On the other hand, Tunisia has long enjoyed the Arab world's best educational system, largest middle class, and strongest organised labour movement. Yet behind those achievements, Ben Ali's government tightly restricted free expression and political parties. In an almost Orwellian way, he cultivated and manipulated the country's international image as a modern, technocratic regime and a tourist-friendly travel destination.⁷⁵

These facts help to figure out many similarities. Both Tunisia and Egypt, like almost all other Arab states, are authoritarian regimes.⁷⁶ Absence of freedoms, lack of liberties and a high level of suppression are common characteristics. The ruling elites range from a religious minority, familial party, tribe up to one party system with small satellite parties. The economic system is weak, corruption is widespread, and the unemployment rates are very high especially among the youth educated population. For instance, the corruption of Ben Ali's family in Tunisia was revealed by Wikileaks web site. The U.S. ambassador to

⁷³ Assad & Roudi-Fahimi, 2007, p. 6.

⁷⁴ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the World Fact Book, CIA official website, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (consulted on 12 June 2012).

⁷⁵ Anderson, 2011, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World', 2010 Report, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2010> (consulted on 20 April 2012). The Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy in retreat', Democracy index 2010 Report, available at http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf (consulted on 20 April 2012).

Tunisia reported in 2006 that more than half of Tunisia's commercial elites were personally related to Ben Ali through his three adult children, seven siblings, and second wife's ten brothers and sisters. This network became known in Tunisia as “the Family”.⁷⁷

At the same time all these states culturally profess Islam, speak the same Arabic language, are part of the regional League of Arab States and related to relatively common history. These facts are crucial to understand that although the Arabic states could have some differences in their political and economical structures, the cultural-religious aspect is mainly very similar and common.

Related to the importance of these ties Huntington mentions that the wave of democratisation is “strongest among countries that were geographically proximate and culturally similar.”⁷⁸ These factors were crucial in spreading the wave of revolutions among the Arab states, which was not the case when the Iranian Green movement was at its most. While the Iranian protests did not move towards the Arab states, the revolts which started in Tunisia found their way to the rest of the neighbouring Arab states.

The Arab World throughout the 20th century witnessed many coups and transformations. However, they cannot be compared to the latest ones neither in the scale nor in the intensity and definitely not in the content or even the outcome.

Over the years, societies in Egypt and Tunisia were suffering from humiliating conditions. The tension and the factors of the social explosion have been accumulating over the years and were definitely leading to instability where the only missing thing was the critical event that will force masses to take the streets. Regarding the timing, The Economist Intelligence Unit⁷⁹ asks, “Why did the Arab uprisings occur after a long period in which authoritarian governments appeared to have been successfully consolidating their control?” the answer as they suggest is, “the interplay of a number of factors may provide

⁷⁷ Anderson, 2011, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Huntington, 1991, p. 102.

⁷⁹ Economist Intelligence Unit issues annual report about the Democracy index in the world.

an explanation: electoral fraud; succession crises; economic distress; increasing corruption; and neighbourhood effects.”⁸⁰

Taleb and Blyth suggest, concentrating on the system not the events, “As a result of complicated interdependence and contagion effects, in all man-made complex systems, a small number of possible events dominate, namely, Black Swans⁸¹.”⁸² In this context, the system is what to be studied in the Arab revolts and not the events. “Most explanations being offered for the current turmoil in the Middle East follow the “catalysts as causes” confusion. The riots in Tunisia and Egypt were initially attributed to rising commodity prices, not to stifling and unpopular dictatorships. But Bahrain and Libya are countries with high GDPs that can afford to import grain and other commodities. Again, the focus is wrong even if the logic is comforting. It is the system and its fragility, not events that must be studied.”⁸³

It is not peculiar that similar incidents like the self-immolation of Bou Azizi did occur before without leading to any protests. In fact, in the past these events were successfully covered by the authorities to prevent the public dissent. And the leakage of the Bou Azizi footage might have played an immense role in attracting the public attention and provoking massive protests. In Egypt, things were not better. The society was living not only in a precarious socio-economical conditions but also facing a frequent “political humiliation”. The ruling party was ignorant to the ordinary people problems. President Mubarak was frequently sarcastic when speaking about more freedoms to be given to people, saying that they are not mature enough to rule themselves.

Finally, The Arab-Israeli conflict has a major role in reinforcing the internal hegemony of Arab autocracies. It provides a ready and convenient means of diverting public frustration away from the corruption and human-rights abuses of the Arab regimes. The result is very destructive on the both socio-economic and political level especially in the

⁸⁰ The Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Democracy under Stress’, Democracy index 2011 Report, p. 17, available at http://www.sida.se/Global/About%20Sida/S%20C3%20A5%20arbeta%20vi/EIU_Democracy_Index_Dec2011.pdf (consulted on 20 April 2012).

⁸¹ *The Black Swan* is a Book by Nassim Taleb where ‘Black Swan’ refers to the unpredicted events.

⁸² Taleb & Blyth, 2011, p. 36.

⁸³ Idem, p. 38.

bordering countries, where the fight for freedom of people is stumbled and stopped every time the regime proclaims its legitimacy by confronting the so called "Zionist Enemy" referring to Israel.

4. Role of the ICT in the Arab Revolution

The epoch we're living in is marked by the unseen development of the ICTs and the wide range of different possibilities the ICTs provide its users. Hence, it is no surprise that there are contradicting opinions on the role and effect of the ICTs in sustaining freedom and promoting democracy. Some regard the ICT as a technology of freedom; others claim that since the design and introduction of the ICT are determined by the leaders in governments (and sometimes not even the national ones), businesses and other big organisations, it is mainly a monitoring and a control tool.

Thus, media is by no means technically or politically neutral. Hence, whoever is in the media or controls the media has a great deal of power. So the access to the information - in some cases - is less important than being in the right position if using it, meaning that people who are "Offline" or do not have the skill of accessing the network probably belong to the powerless. Consequently, having at one's disposal knowledge or information is necessary but not a sufficient condition for the possession of power.

This technological innovation left its side effects on the authoritarian regimes. Van Dijk argues, "No traditional totalitarian regime can remain in power after the massive introduction of PCs, disks, faxes and all sorts of new audiovisual equipment. On the other hand, several new types of rule with a totalitarian flavour are conceivable using this new technology, as one of its capacities is to enable central management, surveillance and control".⁸⁴

Each element of the digital technology used in communication has a particular function. The internet is useful for information dissemination and collecting news, social media for connecting and coordinating groups and individuals, mobile phones for taking photographs

⁸⁴ Van Dijk, 2006, p.99.

of what is happening and making it available to a wide global audience and satellite television for instant global reporting of events. For dissident groups, all of these digital tools allow them to bring together remote and often disparate groups and give them channels to bypass the conventional media, which is usually state controlled and unwilling to broadcast any news of civil unrest and opposition to the government.⁸⁵

While uprising through the history has been successful without internet and other technologies, nowadays the ICT became present in the most protest taking place. It turned to be effective to use the social media in the protest events whether by the authorities or by the protestors.

However, the ICT is not necessarily helpful for the development of democracy. Power might shift to less democratic or even undemocratic forces that take steps to tame internet and other network technologies in their favour. Della Porta and Diani argue that, “The outcome of the movements is not certain. Some might contribute to democratisation only under certain conditions. In particular, only those movements that explicitly demand increased equality and protection for minorities promote democratic development. In fact, looking at the process of democratisation it can be observed that collective mobilisation has frequently created the conditions for a destabilisation of authoritarian regimes, but it can also lead to an intensification of repression or the collapse of weak democratic regimes, particularly when social movements do not stick to democratic conceptions.”⁸⁶

On the other hand, Bimber argues that, “Internet has relatively little impact on the political knowledge or information for the general population. Rather, cyberspace has become a place for activists to post information about political events.”⁸⁷ Hence the role of Internet in this sense is only to provide information for the concerned people about it rather than the mass public which might be offline or not interested in this type of news or information. In this frame, Internet is to great extent the medium which represents the new

⁸⁵ New Internationalist, ‘World Development book case study: the role of social networking in the Arab Spring’, available at <http://www.newint.org/books/reference/world-development/case-studies/social-networking-in-the-arab-spring/> (consulted on 20 June 2012).

⁸⁶ Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 246.

⁸⁷ Bimber, 2003, p. 24.

space for sharing information. This space is close to the unlimited and contains an amount of accessible information that was never available to human beings in the entire history. And if the television was just a mean for the public to receive information, the internet provides the ability to communicate, interact, and express opinions with close to zero costs.

Technology can provide solutions to many problems but its use can also vary from one society to another. In the West, Twitter is a device that is most frequently used to comment on relatively minor media or personal events such as the behaviour of a particular celebrity. In Egypt and Tunisia, its use proved to be much more political and effective – not social networking, just networking.⁸⁸ While Hofheinz mentions two features that characterise the Arabic corner of the Internet today. First, religion that has a greater weight than anywhere else in the world, and secondly, Arab users are particularly eager to engage in discussion – not least of politics, religion, and sex.⁸⁹

What is perhaps most significant about the use of social media in the Arab revolutions is how it changed the dynamics of social mobilisation. The chain of flow of information was impressive. The daily incidents of the revolts were recorded by the mobile phones and uploaded on the YouTube. Through Facebook groups activists shared these footages and instantly the news was spread throughout the social networks of the activists. The availability of the materials online helped to spread the news to other local activists and to gain international attention. Moreover, these footages were broadcasted by the primary satellite television like Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, CNN, Euronews, RussiaToday and others. With the broadcasting of the footage on air, it reached all other parts of society and the world.

It is an impressive information flow where a great role is given to an individual. The role gave a regular person greater power and influence that might have been hard to imagine without the new technologies.

⁸⁸ New Internationalist, 'World Development book case study: the role of social networking in the Arab Spring', available at <http://www.newint.org/books/reference/world-development/case-studies/social-networking-in-the-arab-spring/> (consulted on 20 June 2012).

⁸⁹ Hofheinz, 2005, p. 90.

What follows is the analysis of the role of the ICT in the events of the Arab revolts. While it will be fairly difficult to measure the exact impact, the study will rather try to identify the role of the ICT in development of the revolutionary events. The study adopted - with some modifications - the main levels of influence identified by a United Nations study of the New Media on the Arab Revolution – i.e. *privacy and anonymity, alternative information source & individual transformation, group networking & collective action, regime policy and external influence*.⁹⁰

4.1. Privacy and Anonymity

When talking about the use of the ICT, the personal privacy of the user becomes a critical matter. According to Holmes, privacy is, “Freedom from intrusion into areas of one’s own life that one has not explicitly or implicitly opened to others”.⁹¹

Van Dijk noticed that “The use of networks can have major consequences for the power of individuals. Their privacy and their personal autonomy can be violated, but they can use the same techniques to protect themselves and to increase their freedom of choice.”⁹²

Similarly, Morozov explains, “the internet provides the individual with controversy, social networking works in favour of freedom of expression by making it easier for us to express ourselves, but at the same time it also tends to work in favour of surveillance by making more of our private information public.”⁹³

In the Arab revolts, anonymity was one of the main issues that concerned the activists, dissidents and oppositionists. By preserving their anonymity, individuals tend to protect themselves from being tracked. In general, many people prefer to stay unnoticed when cybering the net. This requirement becomes priority when it comes to oppositional movements, whose main concern is to hide their activity from the authorities, especially in non-democratic regimes. While the latter works on tracking them one by one, activists try

⁹⁰ Aday et al., 2010, p. 11.

⁹¹ Van Dijk, 2006, p.113.

⁹² Idem, p. 112.

⁹³ Morozov, 2011b, p. 62.

to do their jobs without leaving any tracks. What helps to preserve the anonymity is software that is programmed by activists from all over the world.

“Tor” is one of the main software that works on protecting the internet users’ identity from being tracked. According to Andrew Lewman, the executive director of “Tor”, “Tor played a key role in helping Egyptians get around Internet censorship. Before and during the shutdown (downloads took place through the few paths of the internet remained open) of the internet more than 120,000 people most of them Egyptian have downloaded Tor software”.⁹⁴ This helped the activists to protect their identity from the surveillance of the regimes and get around blocked sites.

Ability to act anonymously gave the opportunity to establish oppositional Facebook groups and gather people with the same ideology without being exposed to direct danger from the regime. And when the Egyptian authorities left only one internet service provider working to maintain the bank and stock market, it was probably closely monitored by the Egyptian intelligence services. This made anonymity software even more crucial.

Similarly in Tunisia - one year before the revolution - “Tor” had set up a special system just for the Tunisian activists to protect their identity. Lewman said that when the Tunisian government began monitoring Facebook pages and Twitter accounts during the uprising in Tunisia, the activists were already protected.⁹⁵ The high downloads proved that the usage of this software was important for people to ensure their safety online.⁹⁶

Anonymity software proved to be efficient tool in the battle between activists and regimes, not only because these tools were available, but also because they were heavily leveraged by the activists who made the best use of them. This effectiveness was important especially with regard to the regime response, which ranged from the total shutting down of the internet, to sending Special Forces on camels to confront the protestors in the Tahrir

⁹⁴ Stockman, Farah, ‘Foreign activists stay covered online’, *the Boston Globe*, 30 January 2011, available at http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/01/30/mass_groups_software_helps_avoid_censorship/?page=1 (consulted on 12 June 2012).

⁹⁵ Idem.

⁹⁶ TOR Blog, ‘Measuring Tunisian Tor Usage’, 6 January 2011, available at <https://blog.torproject.org/blog/measuring-tunisian-tor-usage/> (consulted on 5 July 2012).

Square in Cairo. This proves how ignorant the Egyptian regime was in dealing with the new technologies to fight against the protestors.

4.2. Alternative Information Source & Individual Transformation

*“Let's hope that this event in Sidi Bouzid
isn't limited to Bouazizi's health ...
this is only the beginning!!!”*

A statement via Twitter.

The ICT through its role as alternative informational channel can affect politics by bringing the individual straight into the action. This occurs when a person is exposed to materials that are strong in their content and which are usually restrained from the official channels. This transformation is more obvious among the youth. Young people are more in contact with new technologies and more affected with their peers' actions online. This may encourage them and enforce to use online networks and internet trends as the protestors' toolkit. As we mentioned earlier, Egypt and Tunisia has a large youth population and most of them are connected online. This helped in building the new platforms online that facilitated the individual transformation.

However, it is also important to mention that the transformation of the individual is a process which is related to the media as much as it is related to the person who is in contact with the information. New media could make citizens more passive, by leading them to confuse online rhetoric with substantial political action, diverting their attention away from productive activities. In the same manner the Internet may also alter or reinforce political attitudes, and this means pushing to extremism as well as to liberalisation in the same way. This leads to a basic conclusion which confirms that media reacts with the individual according to his/her use of it and according to the already formed culture and psychology of the person using this tool. Thus, the outcome is certainly not the same in different culture and ideology. Nonetheless, what is clear in the picture is the ICT and social media sites playing a role in individual transformation.

Both in Egypt and Tunisia, a great part of individuals' interaction with the events was through internet and social media sites (see appendix. Table H). A quote from Twitter sums up the useful E-tools: “@jaredcohen: One Egyptian says, ‘Facebook used to set the date, twitter used to share logistics, YouTube to shows the world, all to connect people #jan25’.”⁹⁷

In Tunisia, Facebook as well as YouTube were used to spread images of the riots in the town of Sidi Bouzid following the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010. Even though long-term resentments against the government because of unemployment, corruption and restricted civil liberties have existed for some time, it was the publicity around the events in Sidi Bouzid that laid the emotional foundation for the outbreak of the revolution. For instance, in 2008 workers riots broke out in Manjemi region of Tunisia against the government policies. Protests were massive, more than 50 people died. However the publicity around the event was totally enclosed by the authorities. What made it possible to block the wide spread circulation of the news was the lack of the ICT in Tunisia at that time.⁹⁸ The ICT would have been the alternative source of news for people in the light of the total control of mass media in Tunisia. Probably the Sidi Bouzid incident in Tunisia would have come to the same “dead end” if it did not reach the social media and later the television. Few people would have known about it and with the actions of the strong brutal police regime, things would have been silenced. Nevertheless, the self-immolation of Bouazizi has been pictured by a mobile phone, uploaded to the Facebook and seen by millions of Tunisians who were connected to the internet. Whoever did not see it online, Al-Jazeera made sure they see it through broadcasting of the footages on air, the thing that this channel and many others were constantly doing along the daily protests. Acknowledgment of the Sidi Bouzid incidents created a wave of anger among people who were shocked by the story. This anger wave pushed itself through the social media and led to the formation of a new platform of people united with the same emotions.

⁹⁷ Kenna, 2011.

⁹⁸ Kaddi, Omar, ‘Tunisian People support the strike of Marginalised and unemployed’, Radio Netherland Worldwide RNW website, (original publication in Arabic), 27 December 2010, available at: <http://www.rnw.nl/arabic/article/260875> (consulted on 10 June 2012).

In Egypt, the influence of the ICT was noticeable way before the massive protests reached Tahrir square in Cairo. Egyptian activists due to the restrictions on protesting and freedom of expression were active online and taking advantage of the minimal freedom that the Internet had provided. In June 2010 in Alexandria, a 28 years old online activist Mohammad Khaled Saiid posted a video online showing local policemen sharing bounty of a drug bust. This was activists' way in exposing the corruption in the security forces and government. The police responded to Saiid's action brutally. After a few days he was dragged from a local net café and was beaten to death. Even though the authorities tried to hide the crime, Saiid's picture showing the fearful beating marks was already circulating online and gathering different people all around Egypt. Whoever wanted to condemn the action online, started to join a newly established Facebook memorial page "We Are All Khaled Saiid". The administrator of the group, whose real identity was revealed only later, was the Middle East marketing director of Google, the Egyptian activist Wael Ghoneim. Probably it is this event which was the critical point in Egypt. It affected the people and especially youngsters after seeing the brutality of the regime, not only the daily brutality each of them experienced but also on the face of the dead Muhammad Khaled Saiid. This is evident from the number of supporters of the group who are counted by the "likes" the page receives on Facebook. The Facebook page quickly gained momentum and had attracted more than 473,000 members by July 2010 and as of July 2012, the group has reached almost 2.3 million "likes".

Prior to this movement another important event in Egypt also served as a move towards the individual awareness. The strike of the workers in the industrial city of al-Mahalla al-Kubra in Egypt on 6 April 2008 grabbed the attention of local youth activists who decided to support it by mobilising the people online. They established "April 6 Youth Movement" which made its roots through online activism. Over 100,000 Facebook users joined an online group to express solidarity with the protestors.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Shapiro, Samantha, 'Revolution, Facebook-Style', *the New York Times*, p. MM34, 25 January 2009, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html?_r=1 (consulted on 10 June 2012).

During protests, the ICTs act as a direct link for individual citizens to information about protest efforts, participation, police harassment, and arrests going on at that moment. Some of the information is even geographically coded. As the protests become more visible, the tipping point begins to shift back due to the increased social capital revolutionaries acquire from social network sites.¹⁰⁰ This role of the ICT as an alternative source of information results in a rise of awareness of what is going on and forces individuals to react to this reality in a more frequent way and with a higher intensity; at a higher a speed which was not possible some years ago in the absence of these technologies.

Citizen journalism was so wide spread with the help of mobile phones as well. As Brisson and Lee reported, “beyond immediate communications, mobile phone also provided protesters the opportunity to document the events that were unfolding,” adding that as “tools for crafting the revolution’s narrative, mobile phones gave protesters a sense of ownership” of events, and that their text, videos, and photos “will also be used to shape the story that will live on.”¹⁰¹

In such sensitive times, social media proved to be the alternative source of news and information both in Egypt and Tunisia (see appendix. Table H). And not only helped people to find out what is happening around but also what action to take, and promoted the citizen journalism. The absence of reliant sources of the news left the internet as the last option in following up the ongoing events. According to Idle and Nunns, “people no longer had to read stifled accounts in state-run newspapers when they could go on the Internet and hear from the protesters directly through social networks”.¹⁰² People relied on videos posted on social media, Tweets and other information through the Facebook groups. And as much as they were crucial for the activists on ground, these sources of information were indispensable for the external observers, ranging from the citizens living abroad, to the Arabic and international media, as well as the other people of the neighbouring Arab

¹⁰⁰ Keif, Echo, ‘We Are All Khaled Said: Revolution and the Role of Social Media’, p. 6, in *Public Choice Society*, papers 2012, available at http://www.pubchoicesoc.org/papers_2012/Keif.pdf (consulted on 6 June 2012).

¹⁰¹ Brisson & Lee, 2011, p. 29.

¹⁰² Idle and Nunns, 2011, p. 26.

countries who were inspired to make their own revolution. Activists know their country better than CNN or even Al-Jazeera possibly could, therefore, citizen journalists can be the most reliable and credible source of news and information during these significant political events.

4.3. Group Networking & Collective Action

The ICT is an effective tool in coordination among people and thus in coordinating the social movement groups and activists not only locally but also on the global level, in a very fast and cheap way. Thus it is highly effective in mobilising the masses into action.

The importance of the social networking and hence the collective action is crucial for the success of the social movement. The online-space is wide and easy to be used, thus, enables not only the strong ties or connections, but also creates several weak ties. According to Granovetter, weak ties are crucial for the spread of ideas and information. In their absence, individuals are “deprived of information from distant parts of the social system” and find it “difficult to organise or integrate into political movements”.¹⁰³ These weak networks “constitute a resource that aids in moving from individual protest to organised revolt”.¹⁰⁴ In this way internet, more precisely Facebook and Twitter, help people who share common views to gather and organise into groups online, which was almost impossible to be done before.

The well-known researcher of the social implications of technology, the author of *The Net Delusion: the Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, Evgeny Morozov argues that “The Internet makes it easier for us to find and join groups that we already agree with, which might, in turn, make our views even more extreme.”¹⁰⁵ What is also remarkable is the ability of the cyberspace to function in hostile surroundings, thus, providing networks with the ability of extremely fast and efficient circulation of messages.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Granovetter, 1983, p. 201-233.

¹⁰⁴ Coleman, 1988, p. S101.

¹⁰⁵ Morozov, 2009, available at: <http://bostonreview.net/BR34.2/morozov.php> (consulted on 13 June 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Earl & Kimport, 2011, p. 25.

The biggest Facebook groups that contributed for the uprising in Egypt were the “April 6 Youth Movement” and “We Are All Khaled Saïd”. Both served as an organisational platform that attracted like-minded individuals to connect over common interests of opposing the regime. Not only did Facebook provide the organisational infrastructure, but it also provided a crucial platform for potential protesters to network with each other and to share their common grievance.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the groups ultimately transformed into a tool for organising and mobilising protests, as well as a source for updates regarding pending cases of police brutality.¹⁰⁸ The fact that people found themselves bonded together in the same thoughts and cause, and not being alone gave them the courage to react and mobilise. Out of many protests calls that were circulated by these two groups was the mass protests on 25 January 2011 in Tahrir square in Cairo. It took place through Facebook event titled “The Day of the Revolution against Torture, Poverty, Corruption and Unemployment” which was advertised a few days before and received more than 80,000 “likes”.¹⁰⁹ Up to this very moment, the two groups are the most active in following daily events of the transitional period in Egypt.

The National Coalition for Change in Egypt used a well organised and intertwined communication network which included Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to get the word out and to send text messages, such as “Tell your friends,” and “Look what is happening in Tunisia. This is how people change their country”.¹¹⁰ Facebook’s largest impact was in the mobilisation of protestors.¹¹¹ In fact, it could be said that the Egyptian revolution witnessed

¹⁰⁷ Storck, 2011, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, ‘We Are All Khaled Saïd Facebook Page’, available at <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2011/10/11/%E2%80%9Cwe-are-all-khaled-saeed%E2%80%9D-facebook-page> (consulted on 17 May 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Sutter, John, ‘The faces of Egypt’s Revolution 2.0’, CNN website, 21 February 2011, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/innovation/02/21/egypt.internet.revolution/index.html> (consulted on 13 June 2012).

¹¹⁰ Baker, Aryn, ‘How Egypt’s opposition got a more youthful mojo’, *Time*, 1 February 2011, available at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2045446,00.html> (consulted on 6 July 2012).

¹¹¹ Vila, Sussana, ‘South by Southwest Arab Spring Panels put final nail in the “Twitter Revolution” coffin’. *Movements.org*, 15 March 2011, available at <http://www.movements.org/blog/entry/south-by-southwest-arab-spring-panels-put-final-nail-in-the-twitter-revolu/> consulted on 6 July 2012).

the first incident of the “politicisation of Facebook” on a grand scale to orchestrate major reform and drastic change.¹¹²

Likewise, Twitter was actively used by the protestors to coordinate, exchange information and organise their collective actions. In Tunisia the popular hashtag was #sidibouزيد and in Egypt it was #jan25 (see appendix. Table G). The hashtag on the Twitter platform acts as a keyword that can be searched for and subscribed to. The tweet of #jan25 hashtag shows extremely high rates on the eve and during the main protest like on 25 and 26 January 2011, when it reached up to 800,000 tweets. Meaning that, hundred thousands of people were circulating the information about the protests through online channels. Even during the total shut down of the internet and mobile phones, the people rushed to the landlines to share information about the protests and to access internet through the old means by modems.

Social media is a useful tool in organising protests. It helps to increase the number of participants without budget and without a prominent single leader. Social media is an adaptable, accessible and easy tool to use, not a cause which can be used to impact the political landscape.¹¹³ It is important to understand as well that throughout spreading the word online you are actually helping to reach the people who are offline, once an individual becomes part of an emerging group, page or a call for protest online, he or she is at the same time a potential broadcaster of the information offline for the big part of population which is not connected to the World Wide Web. This draws connection between what is online and offline and provides a counter-argument for those who criticise the ICT’s effect offline.

4.4. Regime Policies

ICT can help established regimes to maintain their power in various ways, such as through censorship or counter-propaganda. While democratic countries tend to promote

¹¹² Khamis, Sahar & Vaughn, Katherine, ‘Cyber activism in the Egyptian Revolution: How Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism Tilted the Balance’, in *Arab Media and Society*, issue 14, summer 2011, available at <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/index.php?article=769&printarticle> (consulted on 6 July 2012).

¹¹³ Kenna, 2011.

internet freedom and its accessibility, authoritarian regimes use Internet to establish control by encompassing both, censorship (which violates the right to free expression) and surveillance (which violates the right to privacy).

Consequently, the ICTs are a double-edged sword that could be in favour of more powerful, totalitarian state, or to a more active and acknowledged citizens and society. In the first case, the authorities can use the ICT to enforce the centralised surveillance and control. In the second case, the people could gain more autonomy and political participation.

When the Egyptian authorities decided to block the internet connection, it was not the first time the regime has done that. Many nations - mainly non-democratic - place limitations on communications, sometimes very severe ones, and there are a few examples of regimes shutting down communications entirely. For example, Burma's military leaders notably cut the connectivity during the protests of 2007. Nepal did the similar thing after the king took control of the government in 2005 as part of his battle against insurgents. Local Chinese authorities have also conducted similar, short-lived blockades.¹¹⁴

However, the total and complete control is not always necessary to maintain power. According to Van Dijk, a more practical ways exist, "There are methods of checking on people and their activities that are much more efficient than direct supervision, whether electronic or by eye. They allow plenty of room and freedom, but when a certain line is crossed, a 'red alarm' is triggered at some central control".¹¹⁵

One important and inevitable aspect of the use of the Internet and other new technologies in the revolutionary movements is that they are naturally not only available to members and supporters of such movements, but also to governments and their supporters in the same way. In fact, some of the main institutions responsible for operating communication infrastructures (telecommunication companies and Internet service

¹¹⁴ Johnson, Bobbie, 'How Egypt Switched Off the Internet', Gigaom website, 28 January 2011, available at <http://gigaom.com/2011/01/28/how-egypt-switched-off-the-internet/> (consulted on 10 June 2012).

¹¹⁵ Van Dijk, 2006, p. 99.

providers) are typically easily controlled by the governments of the countries where they operate.

The government might also use the social media to undermine the movement's outreach efforts, or to monitor and then effectively combat its organisational structure, which can be as simple as analysing suspected activists' Facebook pages or the lists of their followers on Twitter. In addition to censoring the Internet and shutting down mobile phone services, the government could turn to Internet to mobilise its own supporters, to identify its opponents using Flickr or YouTube, and to subsequently execute a devastating police crackdown on the movement.

It would not be surprising to see authoritarian governments declaring that Internet-search services are a "strategic industry" like energy and transport and move to block foreign companies in this area. If the impression that Twitter and Facebook can facilitate political revolutions continues to gain currency, social-networking and micro-blogging services may end up in the "strategic" category as well. This will almost certainly be bad news for users, since local alternatives to Google, Facebook, and Twitter are likely to have more restrictive attitudes toward freedom of expression and privacy.¹¹⁶

Similarly, many governments (not only authoritarian) tend to avoid direct responsibility for exercising more Internet control by delegating the task to intermediaries. The intermediaries could be simply the daily users of the cyberspace that would send information about any kind of violations of laws or oppositional opinion they cross over while logging online. This way the government spares a lot of time and efforts knowing that many people regard themselves as the regime supporters.

Moreover, in 2009 Face.com launched a Facebook application that first asks users to identify a Facebook friend in a photo and then proceeds to search the entire social-networking site for other pictures in which that friend appears.¹¹⁷ If the widely accessible face-recognition technologies tool would be available to suppressive regimes, this

¹¹⁶ Morozov, 2011b, p. 62.

¹¹⁷ Morozov, 2011c, p. 153.

technology would be intensively used to identify the anti-regime protestors in the streets and thus putting them in a vulnerable position.

Similar search engines that are capable of finding photos containing a given face anywhere on the Internet are not far from being real. For example, SAPIR, an ambitious project funded by the European Union, seeks to create an audiovisual search engine that would automatically analyze a photo, video, or sound recording; extract certain features to identify it; and use these unique identifiers to search for similar content on the Web. An antigovernment chant recorded on the streets may soon be broken down into individual voices, which in turn can then be compared to a universe of all possible voices that exist on amateur videos posted on YouTube.¹¹⁸

We have seen that in Tunisia the control of the internet and media was an old practice. Censorship of traditional media as well as of the internet has existed well before the beginning of the uprising. All control over the internet was centralised within the government which did not hesitate to filter and shut down the websites. During the 2011 revolution, the Tunisian Internet Agency and its 2,000 online police officers practiced censorship by massively blocking Facebook pages, curbing the distribution of videos and photos, and blocking the websites of foreign media that were covering the events.¹¹⁹ Internet services such as YouTube, Wikileaks, human rights web sites and activist blogs were censored, and the government has even gone as far as stealing its citizens' passwords on Facebook in order to invade, manipulate and delete content on their social networking accounts. The countermeasures by the government were not limited to the online world only – e.g. dissident bloggers such as Slim Amamou and Azyz Amamy, who had covered the events in Sidi Bouzid, were identified, threatened and imprisoned. The arrests came in the context of a “cyberwar” between the Tunisian authorities and web activists, who have been struggling to break through the country's extensive censorship wall.¹²⁰ These incidents reinforce Morozov's point that the internet is a double-edged sword. Yet it is also a back-

¹¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 70.

¹¹⁹ Allagui, Ilhem & Kuebler, 2011, p. 1436.

¹²⁰ Ryan, Yasmine, 'Tunisia arrests bloggers and rapper', *Al-Jazeera english*, 07 January 2011, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/20111718360234492.html> (consulted on 13 June 2012).

handed tribute to the importance of this new media. Here it is worthy to mention that the formerly imprisoned Amamou later became a member of the interim coalition government.¹²¹

In Egypt, at the beginning of the protest the official media diminished the effect of the calling for gathering that was circulated on Facebook. The state owned televisions were ridiculing protestors and activists who were trying to do organise themselves through internet. Arab journalist Amina Khiri declared the death of the state television, “The system of the ‘State television’ fell down not only in Egypt but in other Arabic states as well, and this was natural cause when this television decided to serve the power rather than state”.¹²²

Even though the role of internet was ridiculed over the state television, the regime decided to take action. Among a whole array of countermeasures, the decision was to go as far as to block the Internet access entirely in just five days after the initiation of the revolts (see in appendix. Table K). The rationale behind such measures is clear: movements relying on the Internet for organisation and public outreach can be hurt by infiltrating or disabling the communication infrastructure which they rely on. The regime chose to sacrifice with part of its economy in order to deprive protestors from the key weapon. However, it only forced more people to go on the streets and showed how much powerful the internet is as the tool to facilitate the protests. However, by the time the regime decided to block the internet connection, it had already lost the control. The revolution was already tangible, it was escalating spontaneously. At that point the main work online was already done with the masses already on the streets, therefore the need to organise online has declined.

From all these examples, governmental countermeasures in the online world can be summarised as falling into four broad categories: selective censorship of certain web sites and services, shutting off connectivity altogether, online counter-propaganda, and the identification and tracking down of activists and supporters. All these measures were used

¹²¹ Ash, Timothy Garton, ‘Tunisia's revolution isn't a product of Twitter or Wikileaks, but they do help’, *The Guardian*, 19 January 2011, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/19/tunisia-revolution-twitter-facebook> (consulted on 5 July 2012).

¹²² Khiri, Amina, ‘The Year of the Visual Media’, (original in Arabic), *Al-Hayat*, 31 December 2011, available at: <http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/345196> (consulted on 27 March 2012).

in Tunisia and Egypt. It is the race between the regimes and the activists on scoring points online. The governments might have a slight advantage online but they do not have the street, and when the masses gather and organise in the squares, the internet goes to the second place.

Drawing a picture for the future, Morozov predicts that in the near future, “a banker who peruse nothing online but *Bloomberg News* and the *Financial Times*, and who has only other bankers as her online friends, will be left alone to do anything she wants, even browse Wikipedia pages about human-rights violations? In contrast, a person of unknown occupation, who occasionally reads the *Financial Times* but who is also linked to five well-known political activists through Facebook and who has written blog comments containing words such as ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom,’ will only be allowed to visit government-run websites (or, if he is an important intelligence target, he will be allowed to visit other sites, with his online activities closely monitored)”.¹²³ He adds that, “by paying so much attention to the most conventional and blandest of Internet-control methods (blocking access to particular sites), we risk missing more basic shifts in the field. Internet censorship is poised to grow in depth, looking ever more thoroughly into what we do online and even offline”.¹²⁴

4.5. External Influence and Attention

Globalisation and development of the ICT made it easier to shift the local activism to international level. As a consequence, political sympathy or hostility from external parties became common. The ICT created a huge world of options and possibilities, thus, the borders are no longer effective here.

The Internet and new media has captured the attention of the great powers from long time ago. In 1989 Ronald Reagan proclaimed that “The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip”. Later, Bill Clinton compared Internet

¹²³ Morozov, 2011b, p. 71.

¹²⁴ Idem, p. 72.

ensorship to “trying to nail Jell–O to the wall”. And in 1999, George W. Bush asked us to “imagine if the Internet took hold in China. Imagine how freedom would spread”.¹²⁵

The right to access the internet has been substantiated through intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, independent analysts and the nation-states. Since Hillary Clinton’s speech “Remarks on Internet Freedom” in January 2010, it is obvious that the promotion of the world-wide, free and open Internet has become a high-level United States political objective. Clinton outlined a new policy of the “21st Century Statecraft” stating that the freedom to connect is similar to the freedom of assembly in cyberspace. The logic behind this speech is that the spreading of technology will also result in the spreading of democracy, freedom and human rights, and that the Internet is a new tool in the arsenal for the West’s ambitions to promote its values. One modern term for this strategy is the “Digital Diplomacy”, arguing for the right of people to use the Internet freely which is an appropriate policy for the United States, both because it aligns with the strategic goal of strengthening civil society worldwide and because it resonates with American beliefs about freedom of expression.¹²⁶

Meanwhile, Morozov argues that “the Internet Freedom Agenda has similarly backfired. The state of web freedom in countries like China, Iran, and Russia was far from perfect before Clinton’s initiative, but at least it was an issue independent of those countries’ fraught relations with the United States. Google, Facebook, and Twitter were hardly unabashed defenders of free speech, but they were nevertheless emissaries, however accidentally, of a more open and democratic vision of the Internet”. Regarding the agenda as “the worst thing ever happened to Internet”, he adds, “The Internet is far too valuable to become an agent of Washington’s digital diplomats”. Hence, “the best way to promote the goals behind the Internet Freedom Agenda may be not to have an agenda at all”.¹²⁷

However, Shirky argues that this approach to the internet is politically appealing, action-oriented, and almost certainly wrong. It overestimates the value of broadcast media while

¹²⁵ Morozov, 2009.

¹²⁶ Shirky, 2011, p. 30.

¹²⁷ Morozov, 2011a, p. 35.

underestimating the value of media that allow citizens to communicate privately among themselves. It overestimates the value of access to information, particularly information hosted in the West, while underestimating the value of tools for local coordination. And what he offers instead is an “environmental” approach which regards social media as a long-term tool that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, activists in the world get benefit from the support from the state like United States of America. Federal agencies such as the State Department, the Defence Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors have been funding a handful of technology companies that allow people to get online without being tracked or to visit news or social media sites that governments have blocked. Many of these organisations such as the Tor Project and UltraReach are unabashedly supportive of the activists in the Middle East. “For every dollar that gets spent by companies like UltraReach, there’s 10,000 dollars spent by the governments to protect the firewalls”, said Michael Horowitz, a former Reagan administration official who serves as an advisor to UltraReach.¹²⁹

The close cooperation of Western governments with Silicon Valley tech companies also fuels speculations that the spreading of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and similar services around the world might over time function more and more as an extension of the United States and a tool of its foreign policy and diplomatic efforts, leading to a form of cultural hegemony or imperialism, rather than being independent and neutral technologies.

However, sometimes the external support of the West and mainly United States to the open internet access collide with its other interests such as the necessity of combating terrorism. The support of the West to regimes like Zine el-Abidine, Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak could be well known, but what is less known is that Western support for authoritarian governments in the Arab countries occurred not only politically, but also on the technological level. For example, the filtering technology that had been used by the

¹²⁸ Shirky, 2011, p. 41.

¹²⁹ Shapira, Ian, ‘U.S. funding tech firms that help Mideast dissidents evade government censors’, the *Washington Post*, 09 March 2011, available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/09/AR2011030905157_pf.html (consulted on 13 June 2012).

Tunisian government for Internet censorship – SmartFilter – came straight from American security company McAfee. This proves that the states’ principles of support to the online technologies are based on their political evaluation and national interest.

Since the largest part of the technologies including software is created in the developed countries, there is always possibility to exert pressure on the other countries. Especially, since we know how much internet is helpful for the mobilisation of the crowds, and yet with more specific software its influence becomes even more vital. But from the other side, there is always a kind of global solidarity among the web-activists. In fact, some of the major software were programmed by similar activists and were helpful in overcoming the censorship and surveillance done by the governments in Tunisia and Egypt. Similarly, Morozov believes that “The forces that are shaping the future of Internet control come from the realms of politics, society, and business. In the political realm, the U.S. government and its initiatives will be the biggest single force shaping the actions of other governments”.¹³⁰

An example of one of the external providers of software and online products which has been helpful for the protestors is the Dutch service provider xs4all. When the Egyptian authorities blocked the Internet connections, xs4all (Access for All) set up special dial-in phone lines for Egyptian Internet user, to give them the opportunity to get online.¹³¹ In the similar effort, Google assisted the Egyptian opposition by setting up the speak2tweet service, whereby users could call an international telephone number in order to post and hear Twitter messages without the Internet. The messages were picked up by specially designed software and automatically converted to messages on the Twitter micro-blogging platform. According to the Google corporate blog, by providing the service the company hoped to enable more Egyptians to be heard “at this very difficult time”.¹³²

The external support could also be by financing the software that helps people to overcome regimes attempts in crashing the opposition. A Walpole-based group of Internet

¹³⁰ Morozov, 2011b, p. 73.

¹³¹ Huijbregts, Niels, ‘Dial-up accounts for Libya and Egypt’, Xs4all website, 21 February 2012, available at <https://blog.xs4all.nl/2011/02/21/inbelaccounts-voor-libie-en-egypte/> (consulted on 3 July 2012).

¹³² Singh, Ujjwal, ‘Some weekend work that will (hopefully) enable more Egyptians to be heard’, Google Official Blog, 31 January 2011, available at <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/01/some-weekend-work-that-will-hopefully.html> (consulted on 13 June 2012).

activists known as “Tor” was playing a key role in helping Egyptians to get around Internet censorship during the revolts. It is registered as a non-profit in 2006 and receives about 75 percent of its funding from the United States government. “Tor” itself is a group, which employs about 10 people, runs a network of about 2,500 computers around the world manned by volunteers who help the anonymous network run.¹³³

The cooperation started before the beginning of the revolts. In 2010, “Tor” set up a special system just for Tunisian activists to protect their identity. So, when the Tunisian government began monitoring Facebook pages and Twitter accounts during the recent uprising in Tunisia, the activists were already protected. A few months before that, in December 2009, Jacob Appelbaum, one of “Tor’s” main software developers travelled to Cairo and held workshops for human rights activists on how to use the software to avoid surveillance on the Internet. The workshop appears to have paid off.¹³⁴

The role of the external was noticed even in earlier cases. Iranian activists intensively downloaded similar software during the massive protests after the contested 2009 presidential elections, and China has repeatedly tried to block “Tor” downloads and denied visas to “Tor’s” activists who have trained people from over 20 countries, including China, at workshops in Hong Kong and Europe.¹³⁵

Through ICT Tunisian activists who overthrew Ben Ali were giving all the necessary advices for the Egyptian activists to overcome the regimes’ counter measure and maintain their mobility. The experience Tunisians had and the similarity of the events in Egypt made the help and collaboration between the two countries activists essential. It was actually a mutual group effort cause as much as Egyptians wanted liberty as much the Tunisians wanted to see their brothers following them on the track of liberty and democracy.¹³⁶

¹³³ Stockman, Farah, ‘Foreign activists stay covered online’, *the Boston Globe*, 30 January 2011, available at http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/01/30/mass_groups_software_helps_avoid_censorship/?page=1 (consulted on 13 June 2012).

¹³⁴ Idem.

¹³⁵ Idem.

¹³⁶ Kirkpatrick, David & Sanger, David, ‘A Tunisian-Egyptian Link That Shook Arab History’, *New York Times*, 13 February 2011, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/14/world/middleeast/14egypt-tunisia-protests.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all (consulted on 14 June 2012).

To attract the external attention the activists used different languages. In addition to writing in Arabic, many used English to reach audiences outside the Arab world. Many protestors wrote in English on Facebook and Twitter, and held up signs in English during protests.¹³⁷

Part of the international attention and involvement was through the actions of the international activists group called “Anonymous”. The leaderless group is made up of activists from all over the world and structured in a decentralised way. Mainly they are gather on the idea of the free internet without censorship and describe themselves as an “internet gathering” (group of people who come together online) commonly to stage a protest. The group has performed several DDoS¹³⁸ attacks on the governmental sites in Tunisia and Egypt to support the revolutionary movements and battle the regimes’ attempts of blocking the internet.

“Anonymous” attacked seven Tunisian governmental websites on 2 January 2011, as part of what has been called “operation Tunisia”. Their message was clear, “Anonymous is willing to help the Tunisian people in this fight against oppression”. Not only they would help but also continue till the end, the message presumes, “cyber attacks will persist until the Tunisian government respects all Tunisian citizens’ right to free speech and information and ceases the censoring of the internet”.¹³⁹ Similarly, on 25 January 2011 they launched “Operation Egypt” at the request of Egyptian activists. The operation resulted the shutting down of several Egyptian official sites. They posted their message to the government of the Facebook as following, “Anonymous wants you to offer free access to uncensored media in your entire country,” warning, “When you ignore this message, not only will we attack your government websites, we will also make sure that the international media see the horrid reality you impose on your people!”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Zhou, 2011, p. 9.

¹³⁸ A Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack aims to make websites inaccessible.

¹³⁹ Hill, Evan, ‘Hackers hit Tunisian websites’, *Al-Jazeera English*, 03 January 2011, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/201113111059792596.html> (consulted on 13 June 2012).

¹⁴⁰ El Tahawy, Randa, ‘Anonymous: Operation Egypt’, in *Egypt Today*, 6 March 2011, available at <http://www.egypttoday.com/news/display/article/artId:567/Anonymous-Operation-Egypt/secId:22> (consulted on 13 June 2012).

5. Future via Online

As we have seen, each level of influence of the ICT had an essential impact on the course of the events in both, Tunisia and Egypt. These levels are very inter-related and overlapping and they played a great helping role in the revolts. The facts show that in some crucial moments the internet, social media and other communication technologies available were indispensable, otherwise the regimes would not have declared a war against the internet. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the revolutions would not have happened without the ICT.

The ICT provided the revolutions with several essential tools to organise and carry out revolutionary actions at the cheapest cost compared to the former ways of SMO. Through cyberspace activists were able to protect their identity and have the ability to express their views and share it with others. This privacy in such hostile environments was the key issue to build the base of the oppositional movement. The anonymity was very relevant for the cyber activists in Tunisia and Egypt, like in the case of Wael Ghoneim, the administrator of “We are All Khaled Said” Facebook group since June 2010. Ghoneim kept his identity disclosed until the massive protests in Cairo in January 2011 occurred. After revealing his identity, Ghoneim immediately got arrested (for a few days) by the security forces. Nonetheless, the group was and still is one of the most active platforms since the pre-revolution times. Its high activity was not affected by the anonymity (at that time) of the administrator. Instead, it has enforced it because, as proved, there is less threat to act with hidden identity rather than with disclosed one.

Having the ability to operate without revealing the real identity made it easier and less costly for individuals to exchange their views over the internet. The circulation of images and videos posted by ordinary people and protesting in the streets turned the net into a great source of information. In the absence of other reliable sources, internet became the alternative source of information. In Tunisia and Egypt this opportunity helped many people to get involved into politics by being exposed to such materials they would not have encountered in the traditional media which was controlled by the state.

Accordingly, the results of the first two levels of influence are more safety, accessibility to information, alteration, coordination, mobilisation and the collective action, which is the main core of any revolutionary action. There is no doubt that being able to perform anonymously, being in touch with the others, as well as with the information online, is in favour of facilitating the protest action on the ground. When thousands of individuals are charged with the similar emotions and receiving the information about the protest coordination through the social site networks, the offline protest becomes much more feasible. Even offline, the ICT keeps on performing in the favour of the protestors. In Tunisia and Egypt activists kept updating about the regime's response and what was needed to be done to avoid the authorities' measures. Hence, the people, protestors and activists were almost always a step ahead of the government. Although governments also try to benefit from the internet, but in Tunisia and Egypt this does not seem to be the case. In other states like Iran and Belarus, governments employed internet for countering the protestors and they succeeded. Clearly, the ICTs are a weapon that any party can use.

The significant role of the ICT, its borderless and openness lead to some change in rules of the conflict. If in the past external aid meant fighters coming to join the battle against/for regime, now it also means a support through online activism. While before it was necessary to be in action on the ground, now this could be done from any computer anywhere in the world. For example, the "Anonymous" group operations against the Egyptian and Tunisian governmental structures, the support given from the Tunisian activists to their Egyptian comrades sharing their experience in topping down Ben Ali, and the means they used to counter the governmental procedures.

Freedom of access and receiving information has been a declared human right since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The exchange of information is facilitated by the whole series of inventions of new means of communication and technologies. This includes the exchange of ideas, goods and established stronger economical and cultural bonds. Internet at this moment represents the peak of the communicational technological innovations and therefore it should be regarded as a solid part of the right that universal declaration has stated. Freedom of access and receiving information is an integral

component of a democratic state, therefore autocracies censor internet regarding it as a threat to their existence.

As year and a half already passed since the beginning of the Arab revolts, we can still observe the effects of the ICT by just looking at the daily events in Syria. YouTube is almost the only source for the footage of the protests, the innocent victims and the bombings of the oppositional neighbourhoods. The footage is being spread online globally through Facebook and satellite television broadcasts. Without it the crisis in Syria would not have gained that much of the global attention. The Syrian events could be easily called “uprising via YouTube”. We are not heading to the age of online technologies, we are already there.

In the case study the positive side effects of the revolution were evident. The great political shift in both Tunisia and Egypt is noticeable. According to the Economist’s Intelligence Unit classification of regimes 2012 report, Tunisia has incredibly improved its democracy rank only in one year from 144 to 92, which is the biggest jump ever since the beginning of the index ratings. According to the report, Tunisia now is among the hybrid regimes leading the Arab states with two ranks ahead of Lebanon, while Egypt - based on same report - improved its rank from 138 to 115 and joined the hybrid regime club as well.¹⁴¹ There are definitely problems encountering the new regimes but this is nothing uncommon for new established regimes that need time to overcome the non-democratic past.

However, the outcome of the revolts cannot and does not depend on the ICTs. The ICT is no more than a facilitating tool rather than a decisive factor. Hence, they are not a new panacea for democracy. Through mobilisation, the ICTs can effectively accelerate regime change. Yet their impact is dependent on factors such as an organised civil society, opposition movement or international support and many others. This is particularly relevant for the countries facing a possible transition such as Syria, where the use of the ICTs alone

¹⁴¹ Democracy index 2011, ‘Democracy under Stress’, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011, available at https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2011 (consulted on 12 June 2012).

is not sufficient to provoke changes, even if there are similar factors like in cases of Egypt and Tunisia. The ICTs' role as a tool and channel for political participation and mobilisation will grow as mobile and Internet users' rates increase. In the Arab world, this will intensify the battle over information and communication spaces, as both pro-democracy forces and spoilers will seek to employ them to their benefit.¹⁴²

In the same context, Howard says technology does not cause political change, but it does "provide new capacities and impose new constraints on political actors".¹⁴³ It is truly hard - as we mentioned before - to quantify the exact contribution of each type of social media to each revolution. However, the Arab revolts demonstrated how the ICTs are becoming increasingly important tools for the social movements and the democratic political process, often serving to promote a more accountable political system. The ICTs contributed to the regime change in the Arab countries by helping the organisation of popular protests, by spreading the information, by escaping the regimes control and by giving the cause an international dimension. Moreover, they give the possibility to undergo the revolt in a creative way, becoming thus not only an efficient tool for revolutions but also an additional and/or an alternative medium for it.

A more accurate statement might be that YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and other online tools merely constitute new weapons for both sides of an old struggle. But it is also true that social network sites have allowed protestors to connect in ways that were impossible before. The overall effect of social media is to break the government's monopoly on information and empower the people to share information and coordinate their efforts against oppressive government regimes. Simply it is true that you can cut a piece of wood with a traditional saw but it would be much easier and less hard to do it with the electric saw.

In the transitional period, the ICT can play a positive role by contributing to the development of an open public sphere and helping pro-democracy actors to remain engaged during the transition phase.

¹⁴² Manrique & Mikail, 2011, p. 5.

¹⁴³ Howard, 2011, p. 12.

Firstly, they can contribute to fostering an open public sphere, provided that freedom of expression and information are sufficiently guaranteed. Secondly, the ICT can help consolidate the gains of a democratic breakthrough by facilitating linkages between new and traditional activism, and between punctual mobilisation and longer-term political debates.¹⁴⁴

In addition to keeping the space for debates open, the ICTs can help transitions if pro-democratic activists are able to use these tools effectively to reach the population, to link to the broader political debates, carrying over the demands and momentum of revolutionary mobilisation into the calmer waters of the transitional phase.¹⁴⁵

The era of the new media revolutions is just starting. What we have seen in the Arab events is only a start. The coming years will prove that many rules of the game are changing so fast as the technological revolution is speeding up. With the new inventions coming up so frequently, new resources are being created, for people and for activists in particular. These are new tools, mediums and weapons not only to mobilise but also to create and share new thoughts and ideas. With time the rules of the game of opposition and power, of democracy and autocracy, of freedom and repression will be changed. It is a battle or a race between two opponents for the best use of these technologies. Taking in consideration the circumstances, whoever benefits most from the ICT will have better chances to prevail. Certainly, this tool alone is not sufficient to guarantee a winning end to any of the parties. However, it is probably the best tool that has maintained mobilisation in the last two decades.

Social media and the internet shifted part of the conflict to the online level but far away not all of it. This shift allowed the weaker party (in the sense of power use) to gain some stronger positions, that were previously impossible. However, nothing is absolute, and any advantage for the weak party could almost be the same advantage for the strong party. The strongest has always been the one who controls the media. In this case it is also important

¹⁴⁴ Manrique & Mikail, 2011, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Idem, p. 4.

to study who is controlling the network, and who is in fact having the biggest control over the internet and thus the greatest influence through it.

In the near future, the world will witness more social movements where the social media will be playing a major role. In Russia nowadays we can see that the escalating protests are all being organised via internet. Here media is almost totally controlled by the state and people are left only with a few ways to enjoy their freedom of expression. Internet has become the main source of public debate and political statements, and when the last elections took place it was the main platform for organising protests against fraud and falsification. Even the few non-state controlled televisions are actually web televisions that broadcast online only.

The “What’s next?” question is floating in the air after the large transformation in the Arab World. It is indeed new moment for the region and the episodes of the change did not stop yet. The people are still struggling in Syria and from time to time are brutally suppressed in Bahrain. But the Arab World is in need of more changes, as we mentioned previously, the vast majority of the states are not democratic. The power of people in the revolting states alerted the other regimes that their time will come as well. Many of them immediately started to take preventive measures but these actions were shallow and did not touch the roots of the problem. There is no doubt that revolution time in Arab World is not yet finished and when it will move on, the ICT will always be present there.

The issue has much more aspects to be studied in the coming years. The impact of the ICT of the social movement is changing and the circumstances are changing as well as the outcomes. As Earl and Kimport called for the sociologist to reconsider social movement theories in the light of the increased role of the ICT, it is likely to be the target of the studies in the coming years, and this will certainly create newer approaches to the subject.

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Appendix

Table A: (Country Statistics on Facebook (FB) & Twitter)¹⁴⁶

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Country	Population ¹⁴⁷ as of July 2011	FB users (January 2011)	FB users (October 2011)	FB increase rate (Jan to Oct 2011)	country penetration (October 2011)	% Youth of FB users (19-30)	Twitter users (October 2011)	Country penetration
Tunisia	10,732,900	1,820,880	2,667,620	8.87%	26.25%	73%	9,150	0.09%
Egypt	83,688,164	4,634,600	8,791,800	4.84%	10.23%	75%	129,711	0.15%

Table B: (Country Statistics) (1, 2)¹⁴⁸ - (4, 5, 6)¹⁴⁹

		1	2	3 ¹⁵⁰	4	5	7
Country	Population as of July 2011	GDP 2004 - 2010	Unemployment (2010)	Youth % unemployment	Internet penetration 2010	Internet users 2010 (1000)	Mobile penetration as of December 2010
Tunisia	10,732,900	3 - 6 %	13%	30.7%	36.8%	3,857	106%
Egypt	83,688,164	4 - 7 %	9.20%	24.8%	27%	21,629	87.1%

¹⁴⁶ Dubai School of government, 'The Role of Social Media in Arab Women's Empowerment', in *Arab Social Media Report*, vol. 1 № 3, November 2011, available at <http://www.dsg.fohmics.net/en/asmr3/> (consulted on 7 June 2012).

¹⁴⁷ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the World Fact Book, CIA official website, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (consulted on 12 June 2012).

¹⁴⁸ International Monetary Fund (IMF), 'World Economic Outlook', April 2012, available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/01/weodata/weoselgr.aspx> (consulted on 19 June 2012).

¹⁴⁹ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), ICT Adoption and Prospects in the Arab Region, Geneva: 2012, available at http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-AR-2012-PDF-E.pdf (consulted on 19 April 2012).

¹⁵⁰ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the World Fact Book, CIA official website, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (consulted on 12 June 2012).

Table C: (Freedom House Index of Freedoms)¹⁵¹

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Country	Population as of July 2011	2011 Civil & Political rights	2012 Civil & Political rights	2011 press freedom (0 best 100 worst)	rank 2011 press freedom (out of 197)	2012 press freedom (0 best 100 worst)	rank 2012 press freedom (out of 197)
Tunisia	10,732,900	6	3.5	85 Partly Free	184	51 Partly Free	107
Egypt	83,688,164	5.5	5.5	65 Partly Free	146	57 Partly Free	123

¹⁵¹ Freedom House official website, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>.

Table D: (Davies J-Curve)

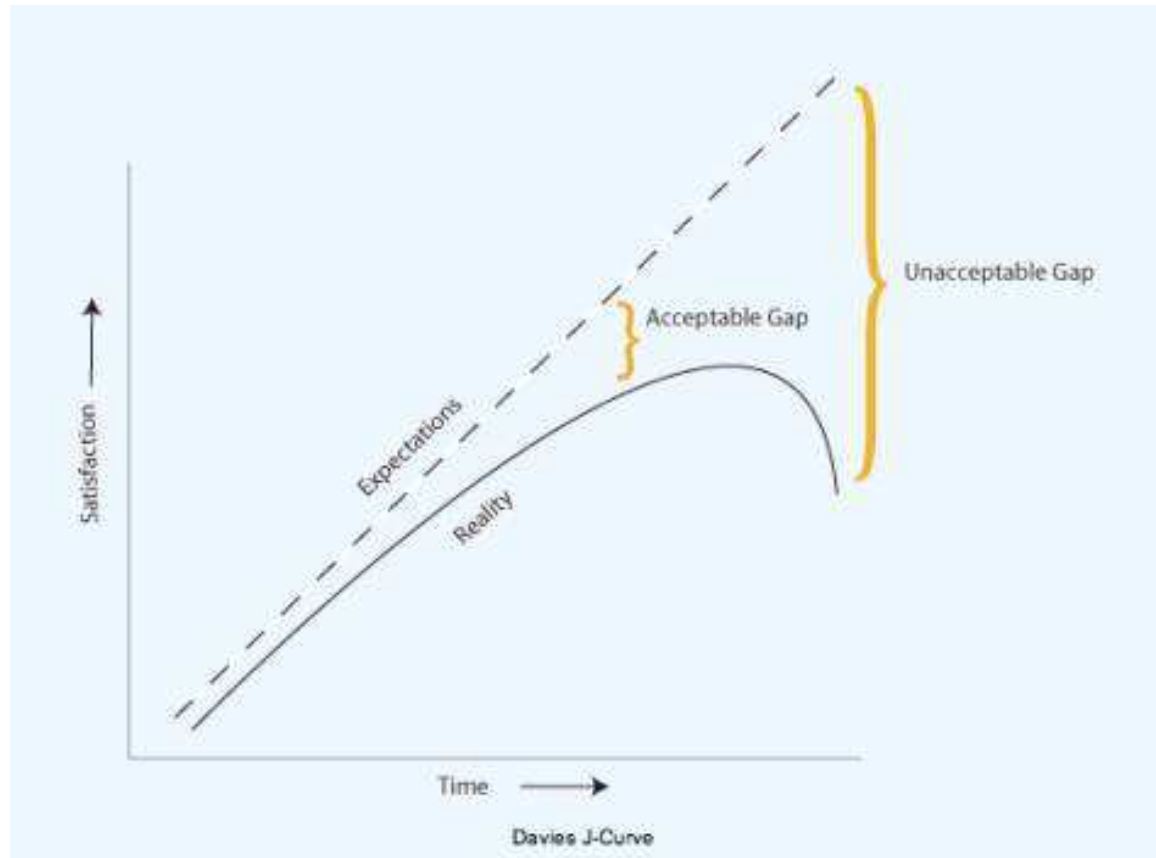


Table E: Egypt Revolution Timeline¹⁵²

<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
25 January 2011	Day of Revolt – Protests Start
27 January 2011	Shutting down the Internet and mobiles
28 January 2011	Friday of Anger
31 January 2011	March of the Millions
2 February 2011	Battle of the Camel
11 February 2011	Friday of Departure – Mubarak Resigns

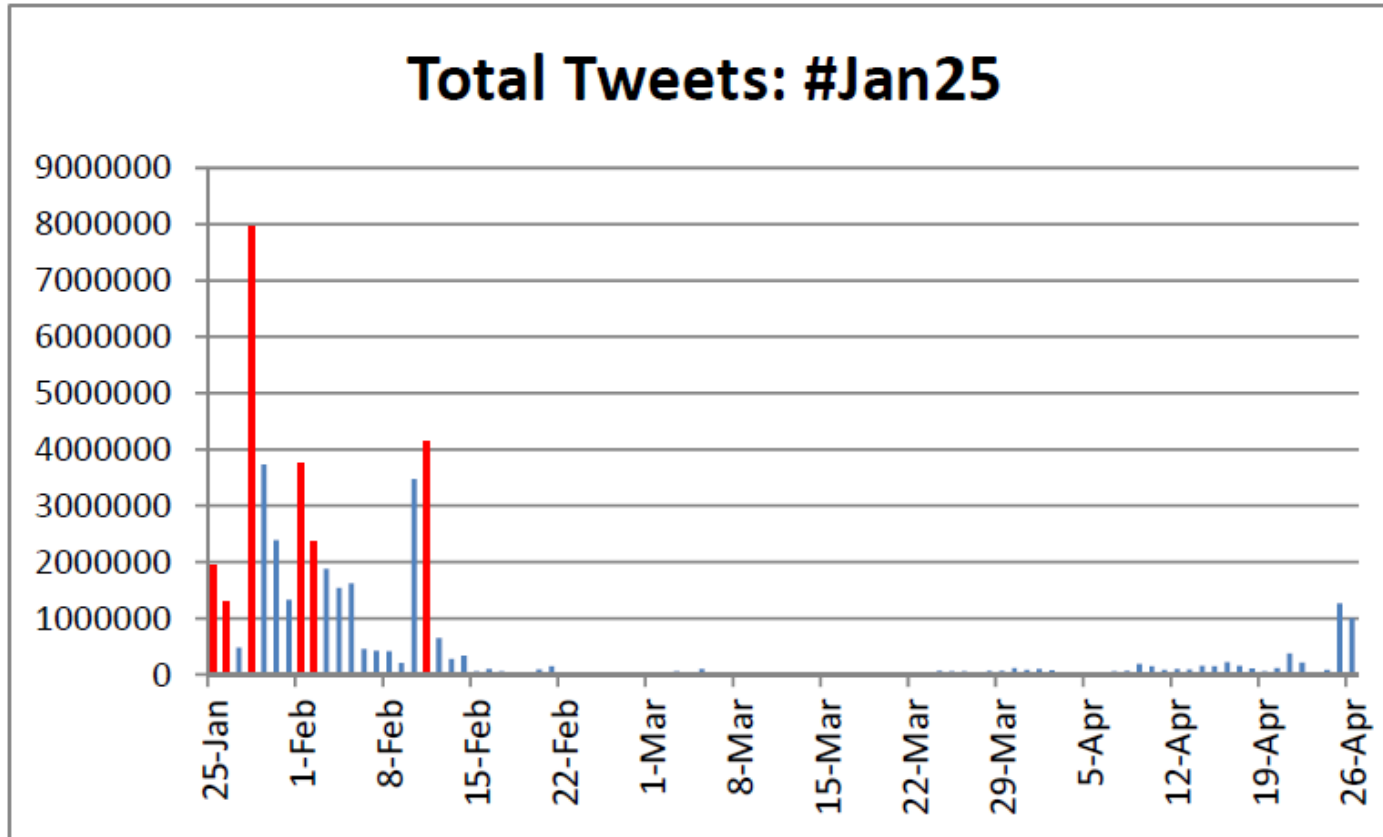
Table F: Tunisia Revolution Timeline¹⁵³

<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
17 December 2010	Self - immolation of Bou Azizi
17 - 28 December 2010	Protests spreading all over Tunisia
28 December 2010	President Ben Ali warns that protests are unacceptable and will have a negative impact on the economy.
2 January 2011	The cyber activist group "Anonymous" announces Operation Tunisia in solidarity with the protests by striking a number of Tunisian government websites
5 January 2011	Bou Azizi dies of the burns injury
13 January 2011	Ben Ali announced unprecedented concessions and vowing not to seek re-election in 2014. He pledges to introduce more freedoms into society, institute widespread reforms and investigate the killings of protesters during demonstrations. Some formerly blocked or banned websites become accessible.
14 January 2011	Ben Ali escapes to Jeddah - Saudi Arabia

¹⁵² Frontline website, Revolution in Cairo, available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/day-to-day/jan-26.html> (consulted on 15 June 2012).

¹⁵³ Rifai, Ryan, 'Timeline: Tunisia's uprising', *Al-Jazeera English* website, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/tunisia/2011/01/201114142223827361.html> (consulted at 13 June 2012).

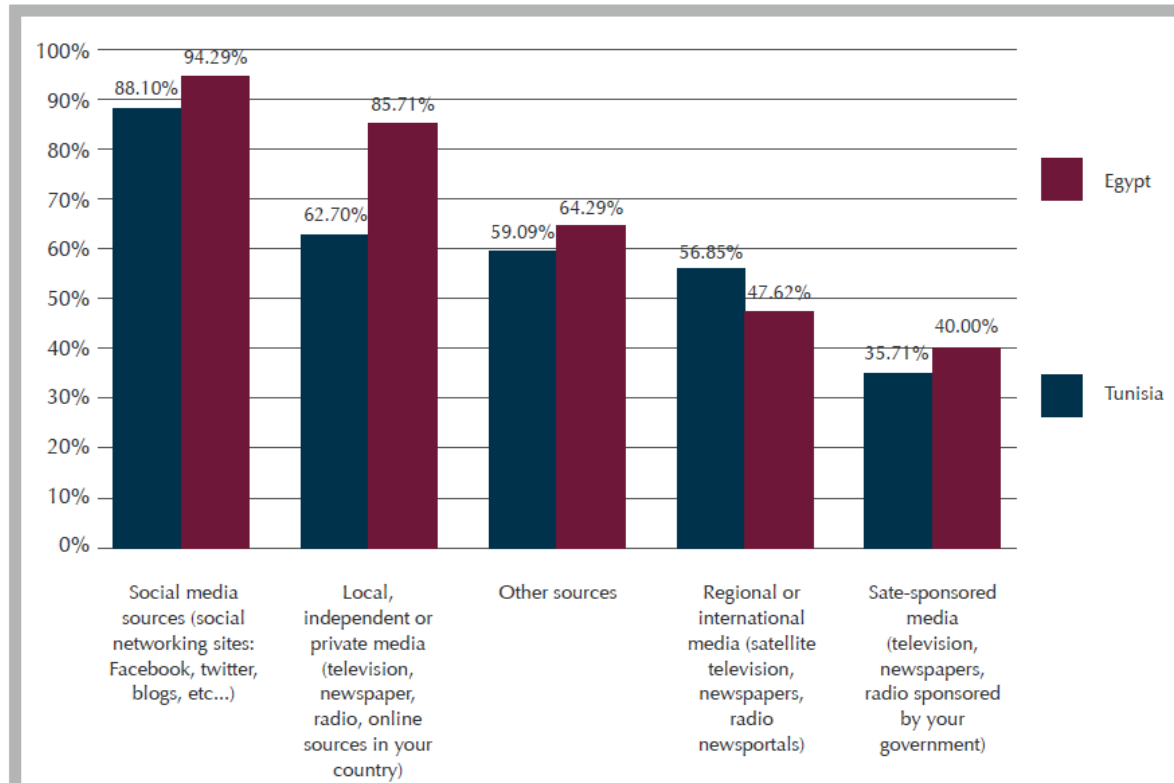
Table G: Frequency of #Jan25.¹⁵⁴



¹⁵⁴ Keif, 2012, p. 6.

Table H: Sources of Information during the Arab revolts. ¹⁵⁵

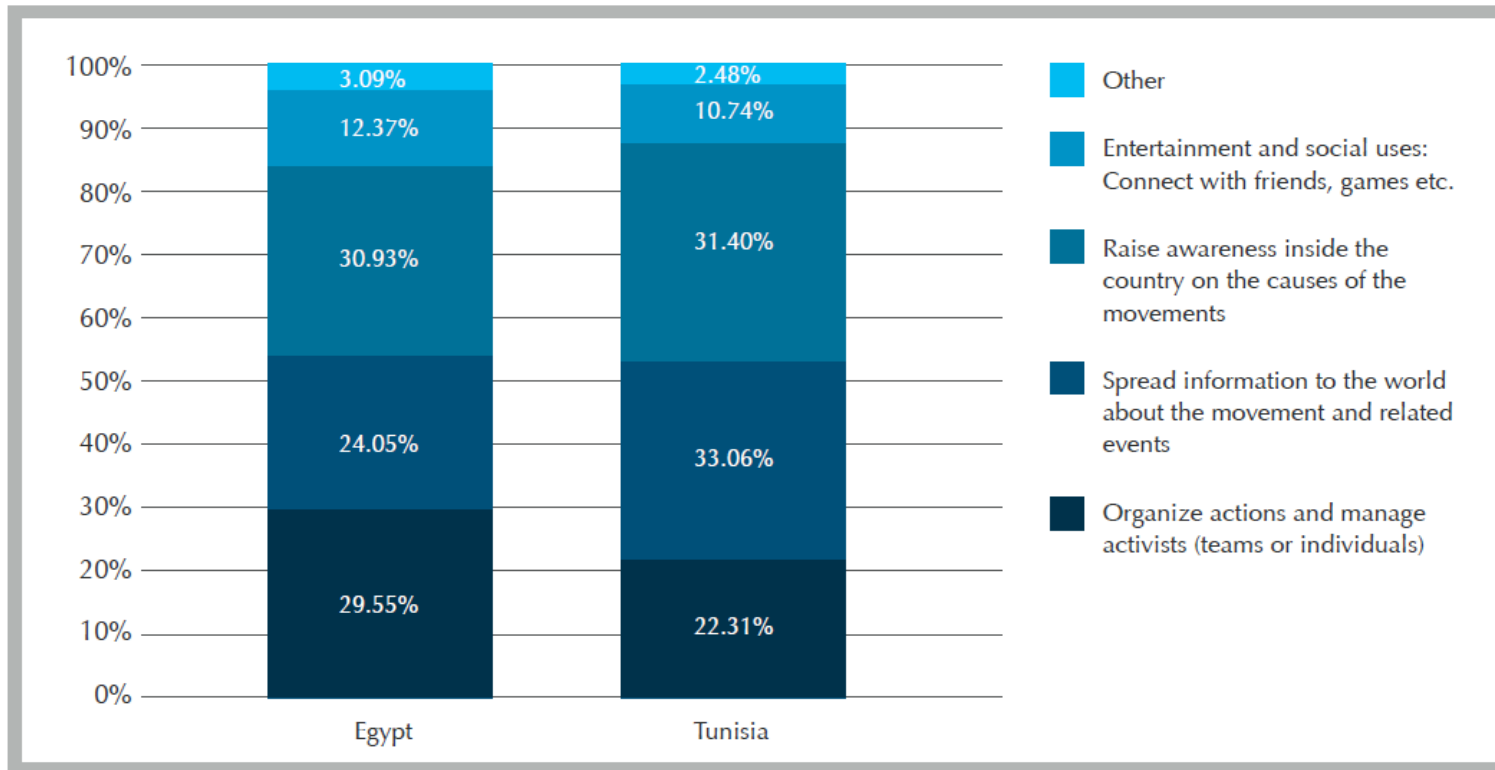
Where did you get your news/information on the events during the civil movements?



¹⁵⁵ Dubai School of government, 'Civil Movements: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter', p. 8, in *Arab Social Media Report*, vol. 1 № 2, May 2011, available at http://www.dsg.ae/en/Publication/Pdf_En/DSG_Arab_Social_Media_Report_No_2.pdf (consulted on 7 June 2012).

Table I: Purposes of the ICT use during the Arab Revolts in Tunisia and Egypt. ¹⁵⁶

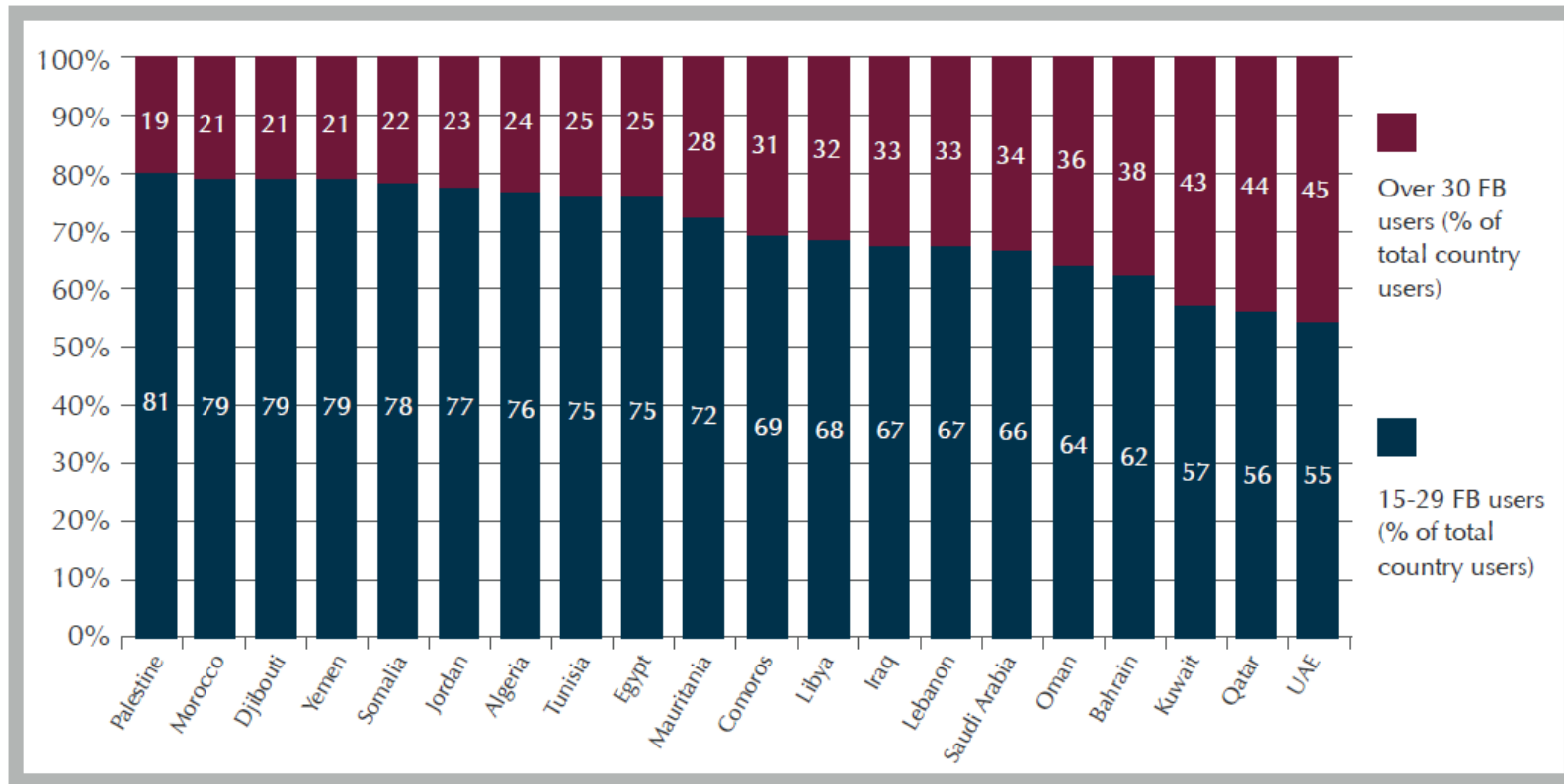
The Main Usage of Facebook during the Civil Movement and Events in Early 2011 was to:



¹⁵⁶ Idem, p. 6.

Table J: Percentage of Facebook users by age in the Arab states.¹⁵⁷

Demographic Breakdown of Facebook Users in the Arab Region (April 2011)



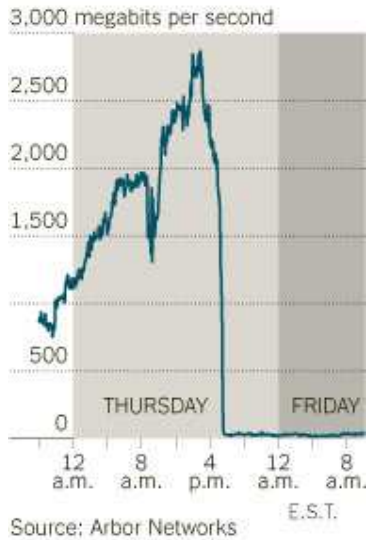
¹⁵⁷ Idem, p. 13.

Table K: Traffic to and from Egypt.¹⁵⁸

Blocking Egypt's Internet

On Thursday, just after midnight Cairo time, or 5 p.m. New York time, Egyptian authorities had succeeded in shutting down the country's international Internet access points.

Internet traffic to and from Egypt



¹⁵⁸ Richtel, Matt, 'Egypt Cuts off Most Internet and Cell Service', in *New York Times*, 28 January 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/29/technology/internet/29cutoff.html? r=1> (consulted on 21 June 2012).