



THE ROLE OF TWITTER IN ARAB SPRING EVENTS: A CASE STUDY AMONG YEMENI ACTIVISTS

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ABSTRACT :

The Arab Spring is a popular term used to describe the revolutionary movement of demonstrations and protests, and civil wars in the Arab world that began on December 18, 2010 in Tunisia and spread in the whole Arab countries. Tunisia and Egypt became the center of this revolution, and then it moved to include Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Western Sahara and Palestine. Yemeni youth's revolution movement began to change the system through mobilization of people and social action. Online networking sites help to exchange of ideas, text, pictures, and video. It has changed the gathering and exchange of information and entertainment among the present for the teachers and students. Twitter is one of the social media websites that has become very helpful in the crisis of Arab countries. It helps the protesters to make their reevaluation to reach to all over the world. This paper focuses on the importance of twitter in the revolution and how the Yemeni activists used twitter to attract more supporters and keep the spirit up. A survey method will be used for the present study. This paper thus studies the impact of twitter in nurturing political revolution in Yemen.

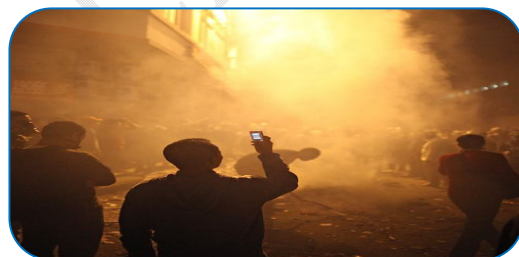
KEYWORDS : demonstrations and protests , nurturing political revolution.

INTRODUCTION:

Social media help individuals and groups to share and communicate with each other through a web-based platform. Users generate online content, distribute and consume it in an interactive platform. Yasemin Gülbahar as cited by Kietzmann et.al (2011) defines social media as “interactive web platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content”. Thus, social media are tools of communication and collaboration through the exchange of text, images, video, live streaming, and presentation.

The word media once referred only to print media, photography, advertising, cinema, radio and television, and folk media. However, with ever increasing science and technological changes, a sea change occurred in the approach to media, their production, distribution and access. A revolution in the information

and communication technology (ICT) has changed the media environment. For instance, earlier news channels were constructed and determined by their output mechanism but with the advent of internet or services related to ICT, it is not only the output and speed, but also the production process and formats (Knight, 2013). Thus, new media is characterized by the enormous changes in media



production, distribution and access, with the digital, interactive, virtual, networked, and simulated technologies.

NCT enabled entire media content converted to digital format. Data in the form of text, images and sound are processed and stored as numbers and retrieved, copied as and when required, preserved in hard disk, memory drives and projected or broadcast in variety of ways.

Interactivity of new media provides a faster and powerful feedback system. To make new media interactive a unique coding language -- hypertext mark-up language (html) -- has been developed. The main feature of using hypertext is hyperlinks that allow user to navigate, enter or exit through any document easily and swiftly (Hassouna, 2014). Further, new media provides virtual multi-sensory experience to people, though in reality they do not experience them, they feel that they had undergone the experience.

Social Media

Social media help individuals and groups to share and communicate with each other through a web-based platform. Users generate online content, distribute and consume it in an interactive platform. Yasemin Gülbahar as cited by Kietzmann et.al (2011) defines social media as “interactive web platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content”. Thus, social media are tools of communication and collaboration through the exchange of text, images, video, live streaming, and presentation.

New Media and Social Movements

Lindsay Ems (2014) pointed out that recent protests in Middle East, northern Africa, and the events like Occupy Wall Street movement are the by-products of modern social structures and technologies that channelized small street protests in well-organized social movements. They concluded that new communication tools result into a socio-technical rallies. Sorouretal. (2014) propounded that both in developed and developing societies, the social movements like anti-globalisation demonstrations in the West, mass protests at Tahrir Square in Cairo and Taksim Square in Istanbul, demonstrations against sexual harassment in Delhi and the Shahbag Square uprising in Dhaka were fuelled by substantial utilization of social media.

Taso G Lagos and et.al (2014) observed that digital technologies provide a vital aid for individuals political expressions because of cost economy, user friendliness and enormous social network reach. Thus, importance of social media in organizing and sustaining the social movement is inevitable. Marom (2011) in his study focused on spatial politics proposed that there is relationship among physical public space and mainstream and social media. This relationship has provided a huge scope for street protests and mass rallies in Tel Aviv. Hence it can be asserted that social media amplifies social movements. Odine (2013) in the study entitled “Role of Social Media in the Empowerment of Arab Women” revealed that utilization of social media has empowered Arab women against the social and political discrimination. Social media helped them to bypass the media censorship.

Social media has given Arab women new hope to overcome their issues regarding education, health and employment. Kara Giannopoulos (2012) mentioned that social media was the main cause behind the Arab spring in Egypt and the green movement in Iran. Internet was considered as important power that helped the protesters to be connected and organize their revolution and the socio-political movement, however, propaganda created on internet was not optimally utilized sustain the modern political insurgencies. Chris A (2003) elucidates the role of Indymedia- the Internet-based network of Independent Media Centers (IMCs) against the World Trade Organization. This network provided the opportunity to various anti-capitalism groups to communicate, cooperate, collate and mobilize. The study describes the significance of organization, socio-politics and its news culture in galvanizing social movements.

Anthony A. et. al (2012) decisively measured cases across Africa of variegated employment of old (i.e. radio, newspaper, television) and new media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, mobile telephone text messaging) by using four social movements as reference during a period of 35 years. Estimations emphasize

citizen empowerment and multiplier capabilities of new media but establish the value of contextual factors that minimize hyperbolic assumptions about the contribution of new media to the formation and progression of social movements. Their survey assessment observed that penetration of new ICTs into society with direct reference to their use in social movements had new forms of media superior than the traditional forms.

Ramesh Srinivasan (2014) argued that both liberals and conservatives in Egypt used in three ways to impact the political power. These include building and expanding the basis of heterogeneous and diverse networks of supporters, assembling bridges between older and newer media platforms, subverting their competition through misinformation.

Steinert-Threlkeld et al. (2015) contented that was the major factor in correlating large-scale decentralized protests that have opened new horizons for balance of power between the citizens and the state. They suggested that even weak ties can also facilitate mobilization by divulging individuals to information about participation from outside of their local, strong-tie social network, allowing those who are on the periphery of the protest. Thus, social media provides people platform for learning and coordination

More than half of the users in the Arab world use social media to connect with people primarily and for getting news, while getting information, watching videos, listening to music and sharing photos are the second most important reason to use them. Chats are the most common activity among Arab users, followed by blogs read by other users.

Over a decade, social media has shown increasing relevance to the daily lives of people and interaction between governments and their citizens. In 2009 social media It has grown in use in the Arab world after, the year sparking protests against governments in the Middle East, starting with Iran, and then in some Arab countries, in what is now known as the Arab Spring (www.arabsocialmediareport.com)

The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring is a popular term used to describe a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests (both non-violent and violent), riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that began on December 18, 2010 in Tunisia and spread to the whole Arab peninsula. Tunisia and Egypt became the hub of this revolution.

Tunisian revolution famously known as the 'Jasmine Revolution' started with series of street protests that began on December 18, 2010, the day after the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid that finally resulted in the ouster of longtime president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. The demonstrations were fueled by high unemployment, food inflation, cancerous corruption, absence of freedom of speech and miserable living conditions (Yasmine, 2011).

Popularly known as 'January 25 Revolution', the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 instigated on Jan 25, 2011 swelled almost the entire Egypt. Millions of protesters marched towards the famous Tahrir square that included Islamic, liberal, anti-capitalist, nationalist and feminist elements to overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The revolution was the result of legal and political issues that include police brutality, state-of-emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, cancerous growth of corruption and economic crisis including high unemployment, food-price inflation and low wages (CNN Wire staff, 2011). The events in these countries have cascading impact on other Middle East countries that include Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Western Sahara and Palestine.

Social Media and People Action

Anthony et. al (2012) studied cases across Africa of employment of old (i.e. radio, newspaper, television) and new media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, mobile telephone text messaging) by using four social movements as reference during a period of 35 years. Results emphasize citizen empowerment and multiplier capabilities of new media but establish the value of contextual factors that minimize hyperbolic

assumptions about the contribution of new media to the formation and progression of social movements. Their study observed that ICTs in social movements had greater impact than the traditional forms.

Osrecki (2014) described the dialectical interrelation between media technology and democratic changes, and propounded that the new media technology only cemented the way to organization and exchange of information during 'Arab Spring', but was not its cause.

Tim Markham (2014) in his study pointed out that generative, self-organizing properties of protest cultures, that are mobilized with the aid of social media try to evade both authoritarian political structures and academic discourse, leading to new political subjectivities or 'imaginaries'. This power in protest cultures and social media enables affective political projection, but overlooks politics in its institutional and formal forms.

Christensen(2013)viewed diverse range of circulation of Arab music videos and public discourse; Lebanese bloggers and mediated public spheres; transnational television audiences and ontological security; social media, television talk shows, and political change in Egypt; youth-generated Arab media and cultural politics; and the Arab Spring as an ephemeral communicative space.

Kirat (2013) opined that new media can mobilize crowds and masses to rally and protest i.e. a social perspective to movements; however, they fail to implement democracy. Social media is unremittingly changing the creativity, social convergence and community relationship patterns of the people leading to new political and socioeconomic prospects of these countries.

Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

Mahmood (2015) stated that Social networking is the grouping of people in the figure of minor societies or a divided peer group. Where they can share the information and ideas from each other. Social media is easy to use in every part of life. it can be used also at colleges, universities, work place, or other social activities. It is a kind of online social sites, where mostly social websites are used. These sites such as MySpace, Yahoo, Skype, Facebook, Twitter etc are design to provide a platform of the individuals to express themselves. To be an active user of social media the user can launch and approach to the maximum number of his college friends or family members. They also can get varied of information from the many sources.

Odine (2013) in the study entitled "Role of SocialMedia in the Empowerment of Arab Women" revealed that utilization of social media has empowered Arab women against the social and political discrimination. Social media helped them to bypass the media censorship. Social media has given Arab women new hope to overcome their issues regarding education, health and employment.

Varghese (2018). Point out that Social media are tools of communication and collaboration through the exchange of text, images, video, live streaming, and presentation. They characterized by the huge changes in media production; it's very easy to access, with the digital, interactive, virtual, networked, and simulated technologies.

The term media referred to print media, photography, advertising, cinema, radio and television, and folk media. A revolution in the information technology (IT) has changed the media environment. For example, in the past news channels were constructed and determined by their output mechanism but with the advent of internet or services related to IT, it is not only the output and speed, but also the production process and formats (Knight, 2013).

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. They are internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of web and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platform through which individuals and communities share co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann et.al, 2011). It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals (Dixit, 2014).

Rash, J. (2011). Pointed out that Protesters went out to the streets against unemployment, corruption and oppression against their governments in "jasmine demonstrations" after the scenes of self-immolation of Mohammed Bou-Azizi. Demonstrators used Facebook and Twitter to organize non-stop daily demonstrations, and they succeeded to gather many supporters.

Brake 2009. defined Social Media as an exercise, practices and performs among networks of individuals who collect online to share data, information, and ideas utilizing conversational broadcasting. Conversational media, as it is characterized by a similar creator, are the Internet applications which enable users to download and share the ideas; may be words, photographs, video or sound records.

Karimat (2015) their study discussed the Role of Social Media in Political and Democratic of the Arab Spring on two countries Arab region (Tunisia, Egypt), it identifies the role of social networks in political and democratic change in Tunisia and Egypt. the study reached a number of results: Egypt and spread to the Arab other countries in 2011 has been able to mobilize a large number of political participations in the emergence of phenomena and break the fear and expose the ruling regimes. social media has become a source of information and news in many media and gave the people opportunity to express their opinions, especially in the Non-democratic countries such as (Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen) because these social networks are characterized by interactivity and low financial costs. Social media has the ability to impose itself to be against the non-democratic government and to spread the terrified among the rulers, whose fall one by one. Social media also was not any longer just a way for entertainment but has become a field for the preparation of popular uprisings aimed to improving people's lives and changing the entire systems in the Arab counties Particularly Tunisia and Egypt. He adds that people start appreciating social networking and blogging, because it allows the young people to address a topic or issue and use the virtual space to communicate with others and express their ideas and aspirations to move the streets, raise political awareness

Yemen and Arab spring

Al - Muthafri. (2012) mentioned in his paper that Yemen is one of the Arabic countries that its citizens asked to change the regime on the wave of movement of other spring countries. It occupies an important environmental position though it held a great deal of the policies of the region countries and western countries as well. Therefore, the spring of Yemen became under the impact of international conditions. Foreign countries intervened in the events of Yemen in 2011, and tried to keep it under control for their economic and security sakes. They see that the security of region connected with security of Yemen according to international considerations.

Mohammed (2013) Stated that Arab Spring is such peaceable protests and demonstrations that began in Tunisia at the end of 2010, followed by some Arab countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. They still existing in some Arab countries up to now. Syria was and still considered one of the most migration countries. The study concluded that these progresses are still ongoing. The Yemeni revolution continued to develop until it reached an armed confrontation till today.

Ali (2015) pointed out that the reason for the Yemeni revolution is neglecting the Arab countries of Yemen and making it worse every day under the poverty line. The Low education and increased of unemployment and Yemeni's have been patience for years of poverty and hunger which made the whole people come to the streets for change.

The "Arab Spring" as a Social Movement

Ems (2014) pointed out that recent protests in Middle East, northern Africa, and the events like "Occupy Wall Street" movement are the by-products of modern social structures and technologies that channelized small street protests in well-organized social movements.

Abdullah (2012) mentioned in his paper that The Arab world entered a new stage in the late of 2011 Associated with this stage a wave of revolutions that swept several Arab countries regimes for change by the minority. Social media has been used for communication and organization among them. New media was the

wide gate of the protesters to contact each other, and which found by the Arab people the easy way and to express their hopes, their ambitions, and desires for change. The rise of social networks like Facebook and Twitter and other modern virtual networking, opened the doors to several questions regarding the role played by modern sources of communication and social networking in the Arab revolutions, which pushed the world to look at the demands of the people.

Cottle, S. (2011) Social media played a very good role after the suicided of Mohammed Bouazizi when he fires himself against the government. The video was uploaded on YouTube to reach all over the world.

Bhuiyan (2011) Pointed out that social media played an important role in the movement of protest across North Africa and the Middle East. Started in Tunisia and Egypt, and spread to another district including Libya, Yemen, and Syria and elsewhere.

Christensen, C. (2011) Noticed that the social media helped Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere, to gather supporters from all over the world, by using twitter as they call it "Twitter Revaluation". He concluded that without the help of social media protesters would not succeed to gather international supporters.

The impact of the media on individuals in forming their opinions and attitudes towards certain issues is very strong. These media outlets play an active role in establishing a set of values and principles that may be positive or negative depending on the content of any media product. Which contributes to the formation of a "mental image", Which contributes to the formation of "mental image" that is always planted by the media in the minds of individuals after the repetition of media messages to make a mental image or modify a distorted image. Which also produces accumulated experience in individuals after a long time, creating specific attitudes towards different issues. There is no doubt that the modern media called by specialists to name the new media as social networking platforms, electronic newspapers and citizen journalism is an active role in the dedication of values and modify and even distortion them if necessary. All these types have contributed to the rapid transfer of information and have also been able to reach the minds and hearts of people very quickly as a result of the massive news flow (Ben Dali. 2016).

Hamoush. (2013). In his paper he pointed out that the media has evolved dramatically, turning them from a simple news and information carrier into a powerful influence in controlling public opinion. The media function is no longer limited to follow-up, coverage, transportation and analysis. It has also contributed to the important decision-making process at the international level. Satellite, daily newspapers, information networks and modern communication technologies have become a powerful and effective player has relations between the countries of the world. The United States of America is still the major controller in the flow of information and the monopoly of modern technology, its relationship with the Arab world shifted from control of the media to the composition of the rulers, and try to control the public opinion to guide the popular masses in the region under the name of freedom, democracy and human rights which deprived the Arab people for long periods because of the dominating of heir regimes under the silence of united states. This has become very clear during a stage called the recent Arab revolutions that started from Tunisia and then moved to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain, and is on its way to other countries in the region. In all of this, media has played a very well rules in the development and coverage of these uprising and demonstration, also in influencing them. social networking sites, especially YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, as a kind of new media on the Internet, in which the average citizen turned into a journalist, filming videos with their mobile phones or digital camera, and sending them to become widely circulated in the global information networks and media.

BarişÇoban et al. (2017) This book examines the increased utilization of social media in daily life and its impact on social movements. The book analyses "social media revolutions" such as the Arab Spring, the 15-M movement in Spain, the Occupy Nigeria movement, and the Occupy Gezi movement in Turkey. The book explains in details the important of social media in the social movements.

It helps students and teachers to find the information easily. Interactions in virtual groups will complement face-to-face discussion in classrooms; also, it is the fastest way to get news and information, updated time to time. Most of the time, Television and print media currently are biased and does not convey the reality. With the help of social media, people can get the facts and true information by doing some browsing. It also helps students and researchers to find jobs and funding. Further, social media offers them a place for discussions and sharing views and information among each other; e-marketing, and helps them find new friends from all over the world (Collin et. al, 2011).

Social media has many negative effects on youth. For instance, it distracts them from studies; and makes them waste time. Many students are spending more time on using social media rather than doing their homework. Education and communication skills are affected, as they stop extra reading and non-curricular learning. It lowers their writing skills, expertise in spelling and grammar. These behavioral changes affect their academic performance (Siddiqui and Singh, 2016).

Today many parents are educated and know how to deal with the technology very well, that they feel happy and comfortable when they see their children and adolescents using social media. But some parents find it a problem and they don't allow their children to use social media because they may use it in a wrong way (Palfrey & Gasser, 2010). Out of 75 percent of teenagers owning cell phones, 25 percent use them for social media, 24 percent use them for instant messaging and 54 percent use them for texting (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). It's a risk for the youth and adolescents to use a social media without parental control.

Social media sites allow many tasks that were not possible earlier as making new friends, staying connected with friends and family, exchanging ideas and sharing pictures. Participation in social media offers adolescents deeper benefits that extend into their view of community, self, and the world (Boyd, 2007).

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The objective of the present study was to assess how the Arab Spring activists value Twitter a tool for their movement.

A structured questionnaire has been developed pre-tested and administered to the randomly selected 60 respondents from the Arab spring activists from Yemen. Data was gathered from 30 respondents over the phone and others through a research assistant in Yemen. The questions ranged from the patterns of accessing and utilizing Twitter to their perceptions and practices of using the social media for their movement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All the respondents were active Twitter users. The study found that majority of the Arab spring activists (78.3%) were using the twitter for more than 3 years.

Table 1. Familiarity with twitter

Twitter Usage	No of Users	Percent
1 year	2	4.94%
2 years	8	15.3%
3 years & above	50	80.3%
Total	60	100%

Twitter related activity among the Arab Spring activists was very high. While 29 activists (48.3%) spent more than one hour daily with twitter, 25 of them (41.7%) interacted with it more than half an hour, and only six of them spent below half an hour with this social media.

Table 2. Time spent with twitter

Twitter Usage	No of Users	Percent
0-30 minutes	6	10.0
30-60 minutes	25	41.7
More than 1 hr.	29	48.3
Total	60	100%

All the Activists were accessing twitter on their mobile phone as they travelled or in their personal computer at home. As printed newspapers and television are very difficult to access due to heavy war and distribution / broadcast hazards, most of the respondents' usually access news through internet-based platforms (Table 3)

Table 3. Source of Accessing Yemeni news

Source	Rarely	Some times	Always	Total
Web news	-	22(37%)	38(63%)	60
Over phone	42(70%)	16(26.70%)	2(3.3%)	60
WhatsApp	48(80%)	12(20%)	-	60
Twitter	7(11.7%)	30(50%)	23(38.3%)	60
Blogs	58(96.7)	2(3.3%)	-	60
Google+	42(70%)	18(30%)	-	60

Arab spring activists utilizes face book to gather news from Yemen, and friends living outside Yemen, and to keep in touch with them. All the respondents were either very active in Yemen (70%) or outside Yemen (30%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Arab Spring Participation Level

Participation Level	Frequency	Percent
Very active in Yemen	42	70%
Very active outside Yemen	18	30%
Total	60	100%

Table 5 shows that 60% activists associated with Arab spring perceive that Twitter has substantial impact on the whole movement in Yemen whereas 40% suggested that television channels had contributed greater impact for the movement.

Table 5. Impact of various media on Arab Spring

Media	Frequency	Percent
Twitter	36	60%
TV Channels	24	40%
Total	60	100%

As Table 6 shows that all the respondents were actively sharing, commenting and searching for additional information after receiving a Twitter post. None of them just read and forget. Most of them (86%) shared all interesting Twitter posts with the friends, however, if the post was related to Arab Spring, they

would post to all friends in the movement. Further seven of them (11.7%) would even call other friends to gather news and information in detail.

Table 6. Activity after receiving a Twitter post

Reaction	General twitter Posts	Arab Spring Related twitter Posts
Read/watch and forget	0	0
Comment/Like	4 (6.7%)	3 (5%)
Share it with all friends	6 (5%)	6 (10%)
Share it with Arab Spring friends	50 (88.3%)	44 (73.3%)
Immediately call active members to know more	Not Applicable	7 (11.7%)
Total	60	60

Though some research articles speak about access and utilization of social media, no studies so far have been done on the use of Twitter by Arab Spring activists. The study was successful and brought out the role of Twitter and Facebook on Arab Spring, a socio-political movement.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the study found that all the respondents were active Twitter users with notably high Twitter access levels and related activity. Almost all the activists were accessing Twitter on their mobile phone. In the war-torn Yemen, due to political instability and distribution / broadcast hazards, printed newspapers and television were very difficult to access. All the respondents accessed news through internet-based platforms. Majority stated that Twitter has helped the movement along with television channels like Al-Jazeera. However, Twitter was considered vital in connecting the members and keeping them informed about the day-today affairs of the movement and events that were happening in Yemen.

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