SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL MOVEMENT, AND POLITICAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF 2011 CAIRO REVOLT

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

Social media has been integral to the 2011 Cairo revolts. This recent unrest phenomenon was led by the country’s youth. These social and political movements were facilitated by social media. For the first time, we see a larger role of Information Systems affording opportunities at the national level to implement political and social reforms conceived, formulated and driven by people’s needs. Motivated by the rise of social media usage as a medium for political change, the goal of this study is to understand the influence of social media on activism, social movement, and political change, using the 2011 Cairo revolts as a case study. Our sincere hope is that IS researches will investigate the larger role of Information Systems and Technologies in our social and political systems, both for the benefit of business organizations as well as for the larger society.

Keywords: Social media, activism, social movement, political change
Introduction

Over the past few months, the Arab world has seen several social and political disturbances cascaded across the major urban centers of North Africa and the Middle East. This recent unprecedented unrest phenomenon was led by the countries’ youth and carried out largely using the social media (Danin 2011; Howard 2011). Since December 2010 to date, hundreds of tweets, liveblogs, photos and videos have appeared on the web warning of a troubled economy in many participating countries. For instance, social media powered the 2011 Egyptian revolution, which is the result of historical consequences related to oppression, lack of political freedom, and economic opportunities for the masses. Minute-by-minute updates, including news, photos, and videos for latest events, were posted from hundreds of Egyptian Facebook users (Ungerleider 2011). As stated by Ungerleider (2011) “readers interested in keeping up with the events are urged to follow Egyptian journalist Mona el-Tahawy’s Twitter feed and the wall of the Egyptian opposition el-Shaheed’s Facebook account” (par. 17). The widespread use of social media in political change is evident from the fact that all major revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East have been fueled by social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Social media has been integral to the Arab revolutions and the 2011 Cairo revolts. Social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Andreas & Haenlein 2010, p.61).

Political change in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, is taking a new form. While in the past protests have been against United States, British imperialism, and Israel, interestingly many recent demonstrations have focused on local conditions and problems and as a response to their own government (Danin 2011). What is also interesting is that these movements were facilitated by social media which provided an opportunity to implement political and social reforms in response to the needs of the people. The difficulty of organizing and participating in social movements capable of exerting political pressure was discussed by Castells in his three volume study of ‘the Information Age’ (1996-1998). In his work, Castells argues that (by the 1980s) the failure of politics to counter economic exploitation, cultural domination, and political oppression, had left people with no other choice than to either surrender or react on the basis of the most immediate source of self-recognition and autonomous organization. However, as he adds that while “social movements do address the real issues of our time” they do so on neither “the scale nor on the terms that are adequate to the task” (p. 61). Social media has provided highly accessible and scalable communication channels and has enabled people to receive political information, express their solidarity, and interact in real time across the Globe. Online social tools allow groups to form around activities whose costs are higher than the potential value (Shirky 2008). The new forms of social interactions enabled by online social tools is changing the way humans form groups and exist within them, with profound long-term social effects (Shirky 2008). In this context, social media have provided new means for political participation in which social groups can organize and obtain political representation and solve collective social problems.

Governments in these Middle Eastern and North African countries struggled to control social media and react to this political phenomenon mostly fueled and coordinated through the social media. Examples include the failed attempts of governments in Tunisia and Egypt to shut down several media sites during the countries’ revolutions (Danin 2011). Government in Egypt during the 2011 Cairo revolts, for example, tried to shut down Twitter and Facebook intermittently, yet was unable to control the means of communication through social media (Danin 2011). These examples demonstrate a change in politics similar to the change that happened in traditional business models and the transformation toward e-business due to increasing application of advanced information and communications technologies. Political issues have started to migrate toward the Internet (Chadwick & Howard 2009; Morris 1999; Sunstein 2004; Wattal et al. 2010) and social media has enabled new means of social and political change (Morozov 2011b, 2011c; Shirky 2008). Just like the story of the fall of Suharto in Indonesia that reflected the impact of creative use of cell phones by activists, and the Zapatistas social movement (Bradley 2005; Gelsomino 2010) that reflected the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to raise awareness, build advocates in other nations, and create public pressure to change policy, the fall of Mubarak in Egypt most recently is the example that highlights the impact of social media on social and political mobilization for revolutionary political change. For instance, the demonstrators during the 2011 Cairo revolts have acknowledged the fundamental role of social media in the political unrest as one of the
Cairo activists during the days of protests tweeted “we use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world” (Howard 2011). Therefore, governments that ignore these social media induced changes are likely to be at a significant disadvantage and fail to cope with such challenges.

Motivated by the rise of social media usage as a medium for activism, social movement, and political change, the goal of this paper is to understand the influence of social media including blogs, social networking sites, and content communities on political change, using the 2011 Cairo revolts as a case study. While Egypt represents only one country and a particular type of political system, the historical success of the recent unprecedented unrest makes it an interesting case for examining the role of social media in revolutionary political change. Just after 18 days, the 2011 Cairo revolts have created a national political change and brought the regime down after more than 30 years of one-man rule. To date, few Information Systems (IS) studies have investigated the role of IS in the context of politics (Wattal et al. 2010). While Weill & Vitale (2001) explained the migration of a traditional business model from place to space and identified the systematic e-business changes leading to that transformation, studies address these changes in the political context are limited (Wattal et al. 2010). More recently, Wattal et al. (2010) discussed the impact of the Internet on political campaigns. However, they did not address the impact of the Internet on larger social and political systems that lead to revolutionary political change. Studies investigating social media and its role in political activism, large-scale social movement, and revolutionary political change are fairly limited or nonexistent in the extant IS literature. It is critical for IS research to explore the role of social media in activism, social movement, and consequent revolutionary political change as these changes have significant implications for business organizations and their strategy in the globally connected world, including the Middle East and the North African countries. However, prior to theorizing and providing prescriptions to managers in this regard, we need to understand clearly how these activism, social movement and political changes occur through the use and application of social media, especially by the youth in these countries. This is critical to understand as they are likely to be in charge in shaping not only the political outcomes, but also the economic pillars of these countries.

The purpose of this research is to address this gap in the IS literature. Thus, we ask the following research question: What is the role of social media in online activism, online social movement, and political change? It is important to address this research question, since citizens’ political decisions are not limited to election voting only (Wattal et al. 2010). Wattal et al. (2010) highlighted the need for research that examines the impact of IS on politics as they stated that “there is need for research to understanding the social consequences of e-politics” (p. 681). This also highlights the increasingly significant role of information systems and technologies in larger social and political spheres, especially the significant role played by social media across different countries in the Middle East leading to revolutionary political changes. By examining the 2011 Cairo revolts, this research delves into the potential offered by social media to create a political change. By doing so, this study provides insights into how information technology influences social and political behavior and contributes to the information systems literature beyond its traditional focus on business. This study is also important for business managers since no business operates in a complete political vacuum. On the contrary, it is critical for business managers and IT professionals and researchers to understand the significant role that social media plays in activism and social and political movements so that they are able to craft business and technology strategies that allow them to be aware of the larger social and political environment within which firms operate and compete.

This paper is organized as follows: First, a brief overview of Egypt and the 2011 Egyptian revolution is provided. Then, we present the theoretical background that provides the basis for our research model. In this section, we also develop our propositions by discussing each of the relationships and the constructs in our model. This section is followed by the proposed methodology section where we briefly discuss how we are going to address our research question and assess the impact of social media on the political change using the data from the 2011 Cairo revolts. Finally, we conclude our paper by addressing our research implications and discussing our future plans to complete this research-in-progress.

**Egypt as a Case Study and the 2011 Revolution Born Through Social Media**

Egypt has been a republic since 1953, beginning in 1952 when the Egyptian Revolution overturned the monarchy of King Farouk which led to the temporary installation of a government under Naguib (Ahmed
Since the declaration of the republic, four Egyptians have served as presidents (Ahmed 1992). The first president to take office was President Mohamed Naguib, the short-lived president of the revolutionary council. In 1954, Nasser rose to power and was instrumental in getting the British to evacuate the Suez Canal and suppressing the militant group, the Muslim Brotherhood, and establishing a Marxist democracy in Egypt. Additionally, this year underscores the development of "Arab Socialism" in Egypt which led to sweeping social reforms. In 1969, Nasser died and Anwar Sadat became the president of Egypt. Under Sadat's power, Egypt experienced the increase of two conflicting ideologies: increasing westernization and commercialization as American capitalism and a "market economy" gained influence under Sadat, and increasing religious Islamization under radical fundamentalist groups. Lastly, in 1981, the year of Sadat's death, Mohamed Hosni Mubarak became president. Despite criticisms of his government due to economic decline and increasing influence of Islamist fundamentalism, Mubarak had been re-elected for second time in 1987 and then for a third time in 1993. Hosni Mubarak was criticized for a long time by the media due to his authoritarian rule. He continued to serve until his resignation on February 11th 2011 as a result of the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

This revolution began on January 25th 2011 and was led by the country's youth. The revolt, facilitated by social media, was focused on several legal and political concerns in Egypt including police brutality, uncontrollable corruption, state of emergency laws, lack of free elections, and freedom of speech (Madrigal 2011). The grievances of Egyptian protestors were also focused on economic issues including high unemployment, food price inflation, and low minimum wages. The primary demands of the revolts organizers were for the end of Mubarak regime and the end of emergency law, as well as for freedom, justice, a responsive non-military government, and a fair management of Egypt's resources (Madrigal 2011). In the following sections, we discuss the theoretical foundation that provides the basis for our proposed research model.

**Theoretical Background and Proposed Research Model**

In this research-in-progress, we integrate activism and social movement research (Benford 1997; Benford & Snow 2000; Kurzman 1996; Marullo & Pagnucco 1996; Snow & Benford 1992), political and communication studies (Bradley 2005; Calenda & Mosca 2007; Castells 1996-1998; Danin 2000; Garrett 2006; Gelsomino 2010; McAdam 1982, 1986, 1996; Morozov 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Shirky 2008; Tarroe 1994; Tilly 1978; Van Laer & Van Aelst 2010), and information systems research in the political domain (Chadwick & Howard 2009; Morris 1999; Sustein 2004; Wattal 2010; Weill & Vitale 2001) to develop a theoretical model of social media and its influence on activism, social movement and political change.

**Social Media**

Kaplan & Michael (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (p. 61). According to this definition, there are various types of social media (Kaplan & Michael 2010). In our research, we are focused on blogs (i.e., Twitter), content communities (i.e. YouTube), and social networking sites (i.e. Facebook) because of their significant role in our selected case study. Blogs are often text-based communication, and are considered the simplest form of social media as they only allow for a relatively simple exchange (Kaplan & Michael 2010). Alternatively, content communities and social networking sites enable the sharing of other forms of media such as pictures and videos in addition to text-based communication (Kaplan & Michael 2010). As “blogs are usually managed by one person only, [while] provide the possibility of interaction with others through the addition of comments ... the main objective of content communities is the sharing of media content between users” (Kaplan & Michael 2010, p. 63). On the other hand, social networking sites “enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friend and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other” (Kaplan & Michael 2010, p. 63). These types of interconnectedness afforded by social media made the Egyptian revolution possible.
Online Political Activism

Using Shaw’s (1996) definition, we refer to online political activism as an intentional action through social media to bring about political change. The development of this new form of activism can be seen as “a mere result of the technological evolution that has given the civil society more sophisticated opportunities for their actions” (Van Laer & Van Aelst 2010, p. 1149). In our study, we focus on ‘unorthodox’ political actions that occur outside the realm of orthodox political participation (i.e. voting), but do not extend to political crimes (i.e. terrorism) (Marsh 1977, p. 42). Activists can be viewed as early risers – “protest groups at the beginning stages of a cycle of widespread protest [and social movement] activity” (Tarrow 1994, p.96-97). Earl & Schussman (2003) view activists as social movement entrepreneurs who are motivated by individual grievances to undertake social movement activities. These activities performed by activists can be viewed as a framing process which highlights political opportunities (Marullo & Pagnucco 1996). Benford (1997) states that “social movements do not frame issues; their activists do the framing” (p. 418). According to Marullo & Pagnucco (1996), framing process involves the identification of issues and conditions as a problem, a proposal of strategies or target action to resolve the problem, and an interpretation of how to present issues so as to activate and motivate the generates number of positional adherence. Therefore, this process is critical in increasing the awareness of political opportunities and participation in social movements. The proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Proposed Research Model for the Role of Social Media in Social Movement and Political Change](image)

Relationship between Social Media and Online Political Activism

A notable phenomenon of recent public practice of social media is its use by a wide range of activists to engage in political protest. Several studies have shown the influence of Internet-enabled communication on activism, social movement, and politics (Bradley 2005; Calenda & Mosca 2007; Castells 1996-1998; Dainin 2000; Garrett 2006; Morozov 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Shirky 2008; Van Laer & Van Aelst 2010). The embeddedness of the Internet into our everyday lives facilitates political participation and engagement and improves chances of a creative form of political action (Calenda and Mosca, 2007; Shirky 2008). According to Van Laer & Van Aelst (2010), the Internet gives improved opportunities to set up new form of online protest activities. The advent of online social tools has increased individual expression and communication between individuals (Shirky 2008). Bradley (2005) in his discussion about Zapatistas argues that information technologies have proven to be an extremely reliable method to communicate messages about social struggles. He adds that “modern form of technology [such as social media] has become a resource that contemporary social movements are now dependent on for their survival and development” (p. 37). In the same manner, social media enables a new form of political activism. For
instance, social media can enable individuals to challenge existing political practices and advocate alternatives and can allow setting up discussion group among individuals interested in specific political issues. Additionally, social media provides a scalable and easy communication pipeline among those individuals, hence facilitating interaction and reciprocity. Therefore, social media can leverage disruption of institutionalized policies in the country. As stated by Morozov (2011c), “the Internet is more important and disruptive than we have previously theorized” (p.266). It provides a handy means for spreading propaganda and revealing government lies (Morozov 2011a). Sites such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to publicize protests and share videos of police brutality (Morozov 2011a). Consequently, this may facilitate political change as Luders (2006) stated “creating disruptions is often the only effective means to compel change” (p. 963). For instance, activists during the 2011 Cairo revolts tweeted:

“It’s now 3 am in the morning in Egypt. Hundreds of political activists are being arrested from their homes at this moment in a very large scale operation. Almost all leaders of Muslim brotherhood are confirmed arrested. More reports that Police agents are pouring petrol in the streets of main squares to set them on fire during protest. Please act” (posted on January 27, 2011 by Mohamed Sami Helmy).

“End the dictatorship. End it now.. Are you sharing? PLEASE SHARE, LIKE AND COMMENT TO DELIVER OUR VOICE TO THE WORLD. Let the world hear us” (posted on January 26, 2011 by we are all Khaled Said).

It is clear from the above sample of tweets that without social media it would have been impossible for the activists to reach out amongst themselves, and even more difficult to reach the rest of the world. Based on the above arguments, we propose the following proposition:

**Proposition 1:** Social media enables and promotes online political activism.

### Online Social Movement

According to Diani (2000), we define online social movement as online “networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals, who share a distinctive collective identity, and mobilize resources on conflictual issues” (p. 387). The members of a social movement are usually individuals who are seeking to solve the same problem or achieve a mutual goal. Their shared objectives bind them together and can then be mobilized toward social movement (Garrett 2006). The spread of social movements is enabled through social networks (Cantola 2007). The development of social movements depends on social contact between activists and individuals whom they recruit (Garrett 2006). The awareness of opportunities is necessary for successful protest activity (Kurzman 1996). According to Tarrow (1994), “people join in social movements in response to political opportunity” (p. 17). Opportunity structure refers to “conditions in the environment that favor social movement activity, and include factors such as accessibility of the political system, the stable or fragmented alignments among elites, the presence of elite allies, and the state’s capacity and propensity for repression” (Garrett 2006, p. 204). McAdam (1982) points out a political opportunity as one of two significant determinants of political pretests and collective action engagement, with the other being the strength of the organization. On the other hand, Kurzman (1996) differentiates between two forms of opportunities: ‘objective’ or structural opportunity, which is “the vulnerability of the state to popular political pressure”, and ‘subjective’ or perceived opportunity, which is “the public’s awareness of opportunity” (p. 153). Using the case of Iranian revolution of 1979, Kurzman (1996) highlights the superior impact of perceived or subjective opportunity. Perceptions of political opportunity were stronger than the state structure (Kurzman 1996). This finding is aligned with critical-mass approach to collective action, which “implies that individuals calculate opportunities, not simply in terms of changes in the structure of the state... but primarily in terms of the strength of the opposition” (Kurzman 1996, p. 154). This is especially true in the case of high-risk social movements (Centola 2007). The willingness to participate in a risky social movement (i.e. a movement opposing a repressive government) requires connection with multiple prior adopters (Centola 2007; Tarrow 1996) due to the strong negative payoffs associated with them. Blumer (1996) stated that “the fact that others are protesting affect potential protesters and attract them” (p. 17). The multiple contacts reinforce both the credibility of information and normative importance of taking action (McAdam 1986). This is particularly relevant in the Egyptian revolution fueled and sustained by social media. Social media allowed people who did not know each other to connect across Egypt and across the world. It also allowed
social movement participants to feel empowered to reach a critical mass and mobilize resources for collective political action on the ground.

**Relationship between Online Political Activism and Online Social Movement**

The transformation of beliefs and opinions requires stable interactions between social movement actors. Additionally, such a network promotes circulation of essential resources (i.e. information, materials ...) for action, as well as system meaning. According to Brown et al. (2007), “online communities form when enough people carry on computer-mediated non-private discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to develop what are considered ‘social relationships’ with other online participants” (p. 3). These communities provide information and social support (Brown et al. 2007). Brown et al. (2007) stated that “individuals tend to affiliate with others who share similar interests or who are in a similar situation,” and he added “the similarity of individuals predisposes them toward a greater level of interpersonal attraction, trust, and understanding” (p. 5). Research has shown that the strong ties connecting individuals underlie their similarities and homophily (Granovetter 1973). The traditional notion of homophily focuses on similarities in individual characteristics and attributes such as gender, age and education (Granovetter 1973; Schacter 1959). However, in an online context, the notion of homophily highlights shared group interests (Brown et al. 2007). These shared interests are then translated into strong or stable connections among social movement participants. These stable ties and homophily are the source of credibility and trust, as well as for effective communication. As Rogers stated “when individuals are homophilous, ... the communication of new ideas is likely to have greater effects in terms of knowledge gain, attitude formation and behavior change” (p. 19). Therefore, due to open networks, online political activism can transform a diverse range of activists sharing the same condition into a social network. This transformation is evident from the tweets of the activists:

“Please pray for our brothers and sisters” (posted on January 29, 2011 by Shakah Hamza).

“I’m sure there are a lot of creative artistic graphic designers and video creators. can you help us by creating some videos using today and yesterday's images and videos with our page url on it? We need to spread awareness using such videos. Can anyone help?” (posted on January 27, 2011 by Hasan Gamal).

This leads to our next proposition:

**Proposition 2. Online political activism enables and promotes development of a stable social network**

The process of collective identity formation cannot be separated from symbolic definition of what is real and possible. Activists seek to affect interpretations of reality among various audiences (Benford & Snow 2000). Marullo & Pagnucco (1996) identify successful mobilizing frames as those “resonate with people’s experiences and their everyday concerns, fit with common understandings of reality, and provide a sense that collective action is likely to have a desired effect” (p. 3). Theories indicated that social movement is not simply a function of individual motivations to solve social problems, but it is also a collective action that is depend on actors’ shared mutual interpretations of situations (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978). Benford & Snow (2000) stated that “before collective action is likely to occur, a critical mass of people must socially construct a sense of injustice” (p.415). The injustice frame can be then transformed to a collective action frame in which “sets of beliefs inspire meaning and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns” (Benford 1997, p. 416) “and underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a particular social condition” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137). Research shows that information and communication technologies (ICT) have a big impact on collective identity formation (Garrett 2006). For instance, online social networks can enable social movement frames to propagate. Also, online social networks can facilitate the awareness of similar struggles across the region which in turn resulted in the development of collective identity. Therefore, online political activism can become a proxy for an individual’s social identity. As stated by Sullivan (2009) “now the young people use the internet, and they are not being actually led by anyone, but they are connected to each other (par. 15). The homophily rooted in the shared grievances leads to the construction of a collective identity, which then can be mobilized to support social movements (Garrett 2006).

The collective identity of the 2011 Cairo protesters is illustrated in the use of collective words such as “our,” “we,” and “us” as some protesters tweeted:
“30 years of killing, torture and abuse by Egyptian police under direct ordres from Mubarak the dictator “and the dictatorship to protest his regime. No more torture. Freedom of expression. We will never be too scared to say it loudly. We will say it loudly. Watch the video. Watch the silent stands that we used to achieve change but they never listened to our silence” (posted on January 28, 2011 by we are all Khaled Said).

“Suez is on fire. Mahalla is almost under control. Under OUR control” (posted on January 26, 2011 by Rami Abdulagfar).

“They could imprison thousands if they want, there are more than 80 mln Egyptians."UNITED WE STAND, DEVIDED WE FALL”...” (posted on January 26, 2011 by Alshabah Mindfreak).

This suggests that members have perceived themselves as a one unit that thinks and feels in a same way. Therefore, we argue that:

**Proposition 3: Online political activism enables and promotes collective identity and solidarity**

Activists seek to mobilize and organize adherents and seek resources to implement collective actions (Benford & Snow 2000; Garrett 2006). Social media enables activists to implement these strategic political processes. In this sense, social media can serve as a valuable mobilization structure. Mobilization structure defines the mechanisms by which people mobilize, organize, and engage in collective action (McAdam 1996, McCarthy 1996). Mobilization structure increases the probability that people would be aware of new opportunity, gain information about this opportunity, decrease the cost of collective action, and acquire marshal necessary resources to exploit them (McCarthy 1996). The events in Egypt provide the ground for optimism about the power of social media (Morozov 2011a). Shirky (2008) discusses how social tools support group conversation and group action in a way that previously could not be achieved. Shirky (2008) argues that with the online social tools groups can form without the previous restrictions of time and cost. Morozov (2011a) discusses how it is natural for the new protest movements in Middle East to turn to Facebook and Twitter as they both provide a cheap platform for instantaneous visibility to its causes. Garrett (2006) highlights the opportunity ICTs provide to reduce and publish political movement information, thus reducing the conventional cost of group formation, recruitment, and retention. The technology helps people to organize and sustain the resistance in ways unavailable during the past revolutions (Sullivan, 2009). The Internet allows for quick dissemination of information and quick response and cooperative decision making (Gelsomino, M. 2010). The online horizontal exchanges contribute to giving greater autonomy to those members of public who want to organize and mobilize themselves, thus promoting the involvement of groups and individual in social movement activities (Castells 1997). For instance, protesters during Egypt demonstrations tweeted:

“Egypt updates: Protest are all over Egypt - spontaneous and not organized by Facebook or Twitter. Remember tomorrow Friday are supposed to be larger from every square and every corner in Egypt after Friday prayers” (posted on January 27, 2011 by we are all Khaled Said).

“Every protester in Egypt is advised to protest tomorrow one block of 8 hours: Morning, afternoon or evening. This way we don’t get tired while police stay up around the clock. Then on Friday: National Protests ALL over Egypt after Friday prayers from every town, city and village. Civil disobedience until the dictatorship falls” (posted on January 26, 2011 by Nabil Marmosh).

Hence we propose the following:

**Proposition 4: Online political activism enables and promotes political strategy**

**National Political Change**

According to Rogers (1996) political change is a special kind of diffusion that can be defined as “the process by which alternative occur” (p. 7). When new political idea are invented, defused, and adopted the political change occurs. Gooden (1945-1996) defined a political revolution as “any and all instances in which a state or a political regime is overthrown and thereby transformed by a popular movement in an irregular, extraconstitutional and/or violent fashion.” He added “revolutions entail not only mass mobilization and regime change, but also more or less rapid fundamental social, economical, and/or cultural change, during soon after the struggle for state power” (p. 9). According to this definition, we
refers to national political change as any shift in a national political regime, including changing regulation, changing law or even creating new ones resulted from a social movement.

**Relationship between Online Social Movement and National Political Change**

Past theoretical and empirical research has directly measured how social movement affects politics (Dainin 2000; Kurzman 1996; Marullo & Pagnucco 1996; McAdam 1982). Social movement activities are a fundamental process for political change (Tilli 1984). The new ICTs enabled new ways in which the action of a group adds up to something more than just aggregated individual action (Shirky 2008). The online social tools enhance social movement activities and make state regulation more difficult as they “offer a mode of communication that is fundamentally resistant to state regulation, reducing the state capacity for repression by hindering its ability to control the flow of information and political information” (Garrett 2006, p. 213). Morozov (2011b) mentions that “the Egyptian experience suggests that social media can greatly accelerate the death of authoritarian regimes” (p.). Thus, social media can be viewed as an effective tool to build profound social and political change (Morozov 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Shirky 2008). The link between online social movement and national political change is evident from the big success of the 2011 Cairo revolts. It is interesting to link this to the role of social media as protesters during the unrests days used to tweet:

“The Egyptian people will choose their own leader, their own government. No one in the world should interfere, on any level unless the people of Egypt ask. It is a culture, a civilization that is one of the oldest in the world” (posted on January 28, 2011 by Nancy Kulka).

“Our single demand is not some minor changes in government, nor it is reforms as CNN just said. Our demand is: People. Want. Regime change. NO OTHER DEMAND” (posted on January 28, 2011 by A bridge to Egypt).

Therefore, we propose that:

**Proposition 5. Online social movements enable and promote national political change.**

**Research Methodology**

Our study follows Eisenhardt’s (2007, 1989) approach and qualitative methodology for data exploration, proposition generation, and addressing our research question. We have presented our initial theoretical model as part of this research-in-progress. We use a qualitative approach because according to Eisenhardt (2007), it is one of the best ways to develop research when it is in an early stage and theory is mostly exploratory in nature. Additionally, qualitative methodology allows for the linkage between rich qualitative evidence to nascent theory development. Our analyses are based upon data collected from blogs, social networks, and content communities, (including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), over a 4 month period, starting in December 2010 and going to March 2011 – all related to the 2011 Cairo revolution. This is a critical period that is mirrored to the success of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and reflects the role of the social media in shaping that change. Further analyses of the data are underway to improve, validate, and sharpen our proposed theoretical model.

**Conclusion**

A large body of literature has been developed to understand the impact of social movements on society culture, legislation and state policy and political change (Snow et al. 2004). However, an explicit focus on how IS enabled those social movements and enabled political change is absent from recent reviews and the broader body of social movement literature. By contrast, this study corroborates and extends recent research that underscores the role of IS in both fostering the development of social movements and promoting the growth of a new political forms. The ultimate purpose of this study is to lay the foundation for much needed research on the role of social media in activism, social movement, and political change. Our sincere hope is that IS researches will investigate the larger role of Information Systems and Technologies in our social and political systems both for the benefit of business organizations as well as for the larger society.
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