SOCIAL MEDIA AND CITIZEN SOCIAL MOVEMENT PROCESS FOR POLITICAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

The power and role played by social media in developing social and political movements for political changes in North Africa and the Middle East have transformed how social media viewed and used. To date, few IS studies have investigated the role of Information Systems in the context of politics. The goal of this paper is to understand the role of social media including micro-blogs and social networking sites in activism, social movement, and revolutionary political change using the 2011 Cairo Revolts as part of narrative research. Particularly, we are interested in answering the research question: What is the process by which social media influence online activism and shape social movement for revolutionary political change? We develop a process-oriented view of the case of the Egyptian revolution and fall of Mubarak and present the story of the event that occurred in 2011 as an emergent and less than predictable event.

Keywords: Social Media, activism, social movement, political change, process model, narrative approach
Human Behavior and IS

Introduction

President of Iceland Mr. Grimsson, during his interview with the CNN stated that “the power of social media ... transforming the political process in such a way that I can’t see any chances for the traditional, formal institutions of our democratic systems to keep up with” (Sutter 2011, para. 3). 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” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.61). We observe developments in social media in the context of recent and ongoing social movements and revolutionary political change occurring in many of the Middle Eastern and North African countries including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and to some lesser extent in Morocco, Jordan and Iran. The political end-game in these countries may not be known for a surety for some time to come, but it is undeniable that social media played and continues to play a significant role in most, if not all, of the social movements for democratic political change attempting to replace the tyrannical and authoritarian regimes in these countries. The recent “Arab Spring” as well as latest events in other parts of the world have demonstrated 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 communication technologies. Political issues have started to migrate toward the Internet (Chadwick and Howard 2009, Morozov 2011, Wattal et al. 2010), and social and political change in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, is taking a new form. This new form has demonstrated that the new information and communication technologies are simultaneously new tools for political participation and social movement organizing. These technologies are also becoming an important part of the research for scholars interested in studying this new political phenomenon (Chadwick and Howard 2009, Gelsomino 2010, Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, Howard and Parks 2012, Joseph 2012, Lim 2012, Morozov 2011, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012, Tufekci and Wilson 2012, Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010, Wattal 2010, Youmans and York 2012). To date, few Information Systems (IS) studies have investigated the role of IS in these political contexts (Maghrabi and Salam 2011, Wattal et al. 2010). While Wattal et al. (2010) discussed the impact of the Internet on political campaigns, they did not, however, 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 (Wattal et al. 2010; Maghrabi and Salam 2011). 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 implication for business organizations and their strategy as well as larger social and political relations cutting across cultures in the globally connected world including the Middle East and the North African countries. Motivated by the rise of social media usage as a medium for activism, social movement and revolutionary political change, the goal of this paper is to understand the role of social media, including micro-blogs and social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, using the 2011 Cairo Revolts as part of narrative research. Particularly, we are interested in answering the research question: What is the process by which social media influence online activism and shape citizen social movement for revolutionary political change?

The difficulty of participating in political change and organizing social movements capable of exerting political pressure was discussed by Castells in his three volume study of ‘the information age’ (1996-1998). Castells argues that (by the end of 1980s) the failure of politics to counter economic exploration, 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. He adds that while “social movements do address the real issues of our time, [they, however, do so neither “the scale nor the terms that are adequate to the task” (p. 61). Social media has provided people with highly accessible and saleable communication channels, and has enabled them to receive information, express their solidarity, and interact in real time across the Globe (Qu et al. 2011, Shirky 2008). The online social tools has also enabled new forms of social interactions changing the way humans form groups and exist within them, with profound long-term social effect (Joseph 2012, Shirky 2008). In this context, “social media have provided new means for political participation in which social group can organize and obtain political representation and solve collective social problems” (Maghrabi and Salam, 2011). 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 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 (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, Howard and Parks 2012, Lim 2012, Maghrabi and Salam 2011, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012, Tufekci and Wilson 2012, Youmans and York 2012). Therefore, it is critical to understand clearly how these activism, social movement and political change occur through the use and application of social media.

Previous theories demonstrate that social movements follow a sequential process (Klandermans 1997, Klandermans and Oegema 1987) and specific patterns of development (Blumer 1969; Mauss 1975; Tilly 1978). Simon (1992) stated that “to explain an event we refer to antecedent events, initial conditions.” He added “explanation by antecedent events also requires general laws to explain how each situation causes the succeeding one” (p. 712). Abbott (1992) pointed out that social reality happens in sequence of actions, and “as we move from theory surface observations toward the underlying structure of events, we move from description to explanation” (Van de Ven and Poole 1995, p. 317). In doing so, we move toward a better theory (Pentland 1999). Consequently, in this research we introduce a process theory to explain the sequence of social movement events and discuss social media role in facilitating this process using the 2011 Egyptian Revolution as a case study. While certainly Egypt represents only one country and a particular type of political system, the historical success of the recent unprecedented unrests make 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. Process phenomena have a fluid character that spreads over time and space (Langley 1999; Pettigre 1992). Qualitative process takes into account the context (Langley 1999; Pettigrew 1992; Yin 1994), and, hence, it can contribute to our understating of many IS complex issues. Yet, process models are underrepresented in both IS and organizational journals (Markus and Robey 1988; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). Rather IS researchers tend to study variance models “sacrificing context and deep structure, in this sense running the story, in favor of building constructs, ... [and forgetting that in the domain of process theory] stories are constructs” (Pentland 1999, p. 711).

In this study, we seek to understand and explain social movement process with temporal dimension. We highlight two contributions of this research. First, methodologically, this paper applies process theory to contribute to our understating of an IS complex issue. Despite of the theoretical advance in our understating of activism and social movement participation, empirical studies of political participation have not look at it as a staged process due to the view which activism and social movement scholars have used to look and analyze their samples. Rather, these scholars have tended to focus on the reasons motivate a movement’s participation (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006). The process approach offers a sophisticated, multi-dimensional, and holistic analysis that avoids a narrow focus on individual dimension of the phenomenon. The longitudinal empirical observation helps to enhance the richness and validity of our analysis and capture the dynamic nature of the phenomenon under investigation. Second, we develop a research model and provide empirical evidence from our case to highlight the process by which social media influence online activism and social movements for revolutionary political change. This research model addresses the complex social-technical interactions that occur in social movement, highlights the convergence of technological and social spheres to generate unanticipated effects, and provides a new perspective where technology is viewed as part of the constitution of the ‘social’. Through the perspective of our study we highlight the unique characteristics of social media that are driven, not from the technology itself, but from the bond of the technological attributes to social systems. The paper is structured as follows; first, we discuss our methodological approach to develop the story of the 2011 Egyptian political change event. Then, a brief overview of Egypt and the antecedents of the Egyptian revolution are provided. After that, we present the developed theoretical model of the analysis of the social movement process. In this section, we also discuss our findings using the data from the 2011 Cairo revolts. Finally, we conclude our paper by addressing out research implications and discussing future plans to complete this researching progress.

A Narrative Approach to Process Analysis

The goal of our study is to generate a theoretical explanation that discuss the influence of IS in motivating social and political change where we highlight the temporal nature of social movement as a continuous process and view political change as an outcome of this process. Our approach to the process analysis
involves a longitudinal, qualitative case study from which a detailed process narrative is produced. The analysis is based on rich data collected during the period of the event 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 mirrred to the success of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and reflects the role of the social media in shaping that change. We use these data to develop our initial model as part of this research-in-progress. Several analysis methods are employed, including content analysis of social media posting, the nature of the discussed topic and the type of activity, and the mechanisms of information sharing. Posting time is used in our evaluation of the data. This analysis revealed five distinct phases preceding the political change. These phases provide a useful categorization for our analysis, but others of course possible. These phases are reflected in the pattern of the social media posting. Also, the processes highlight the different activities of social movement and the unique characteristics of social media that were used strategically toward the specific goal of each stage. Our approach to process analysis is grounded in a body of research that addresses dynamic phenomenon by collecting fine grained qualitative data to extract theory from the ground up (Langley 1999; Pettigrew 1992; Van de Van 1990). The focus is on understanding the processes by which particular effects or outcomes develop over time (Markus and Robey 1988; Langley 1999). Therefore, process data consist largely of stories about what happened, “that is events, activates, and choices ordered overtime” (Langley 1999). In process theories, the precursor is assumed insufficient to "cause" the outcome, but is held to be merely necessary for it to occur (Newman and Robey 1992). Narrative is one of the strategies that can be used to construct a detailed story from the raw data, which includes identified event sequences, causes and consequences. This strategy avoids excessive data reduction and thus preserves the variety and richness of the qualitative data. This strategy corresponds with the concept of case write-ups proposed by Eisenhardt (1989) to cope with the volume of data, to become familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity, and to allow each case’s unique patterns to emerge. Narrative is a useful strategy in process analysis because it incorporates time as an organizing device (Langley 1999; McLeod and Doolin 2012; Pentland 1999). "Indeed, most process research uses narrative to some extent to make sense of process data" (McLeod and Doolin 2012, p. 177). Further analyses of the data are underway to improve, validate, and sharpen our proposed theoretical model.

The Antecedents: The Cairo 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 1992). Since the declaration of the republic, four Egyptians have served as presidents (Ahmed 1992), and Mohamed Hosni Mubarak was the fourth president since 1981. Hosni Mubarak was criticized for a long time by the media. 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. Egyptians were in some sense in perpetually subject to economic, political, and cultural marginality and socioeconomic immobility under long 30 years of authoritarian rule by Mubarak. Demographic experts warned of the dangers of the “demographic time-bomb” in the Arab World including Egypt. Studies show that about 60% of the Arab population are under the age of 25 and are more educated. At the same time, they have more access to information technology than any previous generations. On the other hand, most of them are unemployed, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The crucial aspect of these trends is that the surplus of educated, unemployed youth is the explosive mix that ignited and played the most prominent role in the recent social and political movements in the Arab World (Perspectives, 2011), especially in Egypt since Egyptians tend to be more educated and technologically advanced compared to other countries in the region.

Prior to the 2011 revolts event, Egypt had a very active blogger activist community who were largely free to discuss regime corruption, complain about lack of political and economic freedom. They began to create an alternate social reality that was grounded in a language and symbols that reflected reality more so than the state media, which constantly made distortions and expand the perceived gap between the current ethics and aspirations of people and the present reality of everyday lives of Egyptians. This language of ‘lie’ or ‘falsehood’ from the regime was in stark contrast to the language and symbols created by the activists that was a refreshing outlet in the cyberspace that was true and reflective of the reality on the ground for the ordinary Egyptians. Then was the revolutions initiating event of the self-immolation of
young and jobless Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, being deprived of his vegetable stand and humiliated by the authorities, triggered popular movements and historic events in the Arab World completely unexpected in their magnitude. These popular social and political movements represent for the first time, in the context of Middle Eastern and North African countries, people peacefully shaking the foundation of deeply entrenched authoritarian repressive rule and emerging as new and proud political actors. Initial euphoria has transformed into broad political awareness among these political actors in Egypt through the remarkable process of people’s self-empowerment. The opening of the political space provides a unique opportunity for the populations to carry out a large scale social movement for revolutionary political change. This revolution was initiated and orchestrated on January 25th 2011 by the country’s youth and was driven by several legal and political concerns in including police brutality, uncontrollable corruption, state of emergency laws, lack of free elections, and freedom of speech (Madriga 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 (Madriga 2011). The fall of Mubarak in Egypt on February 11th 2011 as a result of the 2011 Egyptian revolution is the current example that highlights the impact of social media on social and political mobilization for revolutionary political change in the most recent history. Therefore, by examining the 2011 Cairo revolts as a case study, this research delves into the potential offered by social media to generate and facilitate social movement process.

Social Movement Process and Research Model

In this section we present social movement process analysis based on the case of Cairo 2011 revolution. Our analysis of this process revealed five distinct phases preceding the political change: recognition of current issues and status, collective awareness, collective memory, collective interpretation, and political strategy implementation. These phases highlight the different outcomes of each stage’s activities, the unique nature of each stage activities, the different roles played by social media throughout the process, and the nature of the topic of the social media posting. A summary of our findings and details on each of the theoretical model phases are presented below.

Phase 1: Recognition of Current Issues and Status: Social Media Enhanced News and Information Provision and Representation

Prior to the Cairo 2011 revolution event, many independent men and women young Egyptian have used several social networking and video sharing sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube as means to report and broadcast news. At the phase preceded the revolt events, many citizens have become journalists as they captured and disseminated hundreds of thousands of images and video clips of several social and political issues. In a non-democratic country, such as Egypt, governments use all possible mechanisms to control media channels (Haider 2009). Therefore, individuals cannot discuss differing viewpoints (Haider 2009). Yet, the online social tools have provided a voice for silenced groups in Egypt to express their concerns about several political and economic matters. One of the important characteristics of social media is that they tend to be free, providing a wide accessibility (Joseph 2012). Many individuals used social media sites to upload their text messages, images and videos showing different incidents of police brutality, inequity, and uncontrollable corruption in the country. Such freedom of expression would not be possible through the traditional media channels, such as the TV, radio and print press, which are controlled by the government. Ghanam (2011) stated that “social media has enabled the most significant advance in freedom of expression and association in contemporary Arab history” (para. 10). Also, social media tools have enhanced individual capabilities for efficient and effective news and information representation hence changing the way we can experience the events. Social media provides easy to use capabilities that are becoming more and more common (Joseph 2012). The technical capabilities provided by social media to broadcast and support user-generated posts through online text, images, and live video streams further enable to connect readers with the actual experiences. The wide availability of social media helps to expand access to unfiltered information in an important new way (Joseph 2012, Qu et al. 2012). Therefore, social media at this phase played a large role
in providing this platform for social construction of the ‘truthful’ reality in contrast to the ‘falsehood’ of the regime media which in turn enhanced citizens’ understanding of real status and current issues, facilitated their learning of several concerns, provoked their emotions, and generate tension among people. For example, the story and photograph of Khaled Said, who believed to be the reason that “sparked a virtual revolution that affecting Egypt’s tightly society” (Eltahaway, 2010, para.1), has disseminated through Facebook and Twitter to bring attention to his death, contribute to the growing discontent in the weeks leading up to the Egyptian revolution of 2011, and form later the largest memory of police brutality.

We are all Khaled Said
Khaled Said, a 28-year-old Egyptian from the coastal city of Alexandria, Egypt, was tortured to death at the hands of two police officers. Several eye witnesses described how Khalid was taken by the two policemen into the entrance of a residential building where he was brutally punched and kicked. The two policemen ban...See More

Phase 2: Collective Awareness: Social Media Enhanced Political Engagement, View Exchange and Opinion Formation

The recognition of the country’s real status and current issues at the previous phase besides the capabilities offered by social media sites to support user generated content while protecting participants’ identities have created opportunities for citizens for political participation. The global revolutionized communication capabilities and popularly of social media sites have not only facilitated news and information sharing, but also broadened the expression of citizens’ thoughts, ideas, opinions, research articles about social injustices and enhance the engagement of millions of people in digital communities and social networking sites. One major role social media may play is opinion expression and exchange (Qu et al. 2012). According to Joseph (2012), “access to information leads to conversation and debate, through which political opinion is formed” (p.155). Politically, access to conversation is more important than access to information (Shirky 2011). The ability to stay anonymous enabled people to overcome their...
psychological fear barriers to engage in a free exchange of their view, and expression of their political opinion. For many citizens, social media has offered open lines of communication and a means to reach likeminded individuals, particularly when traditional media channels served as blockade to the freedom of speech in Egypt. Figure 1 shows that the role of social media in news and information provision and representation is a prerequisite for citizens’ engagement in social and political view exchange. Many scholars have argued that there is a strong relationship between the flow of information provided by IS and political behavior including political cognition (Bimber 2001; Eveland et al 2004), political meaning (Davenport 2007), political discussion (Eveland et al 2004; Norris 2001); political participation (Bimber 2001), public opinion (Norris 2001), and political mobilization (Dahlgren 2005). Wafula (2011) stated that “social networks provide a two-way conversation unlike the mainstream media that has limited to use of live call-ins and short messages making it much easier to mobilize a group” (para. 7). In turn, at this phase people started to socially construct a collective sense of injustice. Individuals interested in specific political issues began to initiate a political discussion that challenge existing political practices and advocate alternatives, or engaged in debates to form an opinion of the current issues and concern. Many tweets during this phase reflect how people started to raise public awareness concerning the problems in the country. For instance, one of the participants during this early phase prior to the demonstration event tweeted:

“Let’s analyze the situation together. I need our input plz. I’m sure that many minds thinking together are very effective.”

“Overlooking the footage of the video, what do you think? What points do you agree or disagree with? It will be interesting to know your views and open up a discussion about it.”

Such discussions built a collective awareness of several political concerns and economic issues, and reveal the trend of the community by reflecting the extent of people share the same emotions. Jave (2007) stated that “an important component in understanding influence is to detect sentiment and opinions. Aggregated opinions over many users is a predictor for an interesting trend in a community” (p. 1934). Thus, online social networks at this phase helped to increase visibility to the world and facilitate the awareness of similar struggles across the region which in turn has led to the development of collective sense of the current issues. This in turn facilitates the development of a collective memory structure that activates and facilitates the social movement as discussed in the following phase.

**Phase 3: Collective Memory: Social Media Boosted Social Media Campaign and Identity Formation**

At this phase, the role of social media started to change to influence new forms of social and political action in which information are used to engage participation in ameliorative collective action. In this sense, the discussions took place within social networking sites started to grow to embrace some sort of intentional or purposeful dialogue to bring about political change. Social actors who are motivated by individual grievances begin to undertake social movement activities to affect interpretations of reality among various audiences. Discussions were more organized toward formulating meanings, or frames, of current situations and issues. These new social movement meanings carried powerful intellectual and emotional messages, and acted like integration forces of solidarity to bind individual into a unified whole. As a result, these discussions were then channeled into a shared memory. Fine and Beim (2007) considers that collective memory analyses should consider the bundles of memory schemata that are located at the supraindividual level of social life and formed through social interaction. Collective memory is the by-product of social interaction. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter provide such information technology-based platform where social interaction can occur among multitude of social actors interested in achieving their freedom in Egypt and interestingly this social interaction overcomes the limitations of nation-states and their borders. A novel aspect of social media conversion is that “it is not limited to one-to-one conversation” but it enables conversation from many to many (Joseph 2012, Shirky 2011). By providing a space for social interaction among protest participants, arguably free from interference from the security apparatus of the Mobarak regime, social media facilitated the development of collective memory as a by-product of the interaction. Moreover, as an information system social media also provided a permanency and easy accessibility to the informative acts that were integral to the formation of collective memory. This permanency allowed protest activists in and outside of Egypt to relieve and review the discourse as situated social action (Heracleous and Marshak 2004). This extraordinary characteristic of social media may have facilitated rapid convergence for the outcome of the
protest movement and allowed consensus to build up quickly to hold the movement together. During this phase of the movement, social media had empowered many well educated men and women to demand many social and political changes in the country become the new influencer. For instance, we can notice many tweets that were directly blaming either police or government in general, and videos that encourage Egyptians and their friends worldwide to stop being silent and speak out against social injustice and brutality.

"30 years of killing, torture and abuse by Egyptian police under direct orders 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"

This distributed memory store history of events and reflect the experiences of protests participants captured through online text, pictures, and videos allows connecting citizens with the protest experience in its raw form and sharing virtually related emotions of anger and frustration. These emotions have derived the structure of power that holds back the entire social movement group as discussed in the flowing section.

**Phase 4: Collective Interpretation: Social Media Enhanced Stable Ties and Community Formation and Collaboration**

At this phase, interaction took a different dimension. The online social networks enable social movement frames to propagate. The global interaction and interdependency among the activist of the movement and protest participants transform activists’ beliefs, ideas, and opinions, influence the way people think and learn, promote their meaning system, and lead to their coordination. The open networks and communication help the formation of collective mind view which is an important aspect of a social movement. The shared interests are then translated into strong or stable connections among social movement participants. 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 dependent on actors’ shared mutual interpretations of situations (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978). Social media expedites and enables protests’ movement by establishing these emotional connections. In turn, at this phase protest groups started to observe a positive and actual outcome as many citizens interested and involved in the movement were interacting in real time and expressing their solidarity. 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). Many tweets during the 2011 Cairo revolts has shown that weak ties between people initiated on the web can become strong ties and forge close relationships that are effective in organizing for social change. 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:

“Come all Egyptian unite here. This is the first step to unify on the Facebook. Join us on (LIVE) page. Share and Like with all Egyptian"

“guys we are trying to get all Egyptian on FB to have the same status saying "leave and let us live" if millions of us on FB saying the same message, it will have an impact. Please let all your friends know and encourage them to have the same status"

**Phase 5: Political Strategy Implementation: Social Media Enhanced Decision Making and Process-Oriented Strategy Execution**

As discussed at the previous phase, social media enabled people to obtain a political representation which in turn enabled them to carry out a process-oriented strategy, where the community tends to initiate and resolve specific issues. At this phase, social media empower people, and provide them improved opportunities to implement political and social reforms in response to people needs. During the revolution event, protesters envisioned social media not only in supporting role but as mechanisms that provide opportunity for political change. The technological evolution offered by social media provides the society “more sophisticated opportunities for their actions” (Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010, p. 1149). Social media enables activists to implement this strategic political process. The stable network among participants promotes the circulation of essential resources (i. e. information and materials ... etc.) for action.
“Tomorrow Friday will be our biggest day to date. We are aiming to achieve 1 million marchers. We will be peaceful and just calling for our rights. If we stay peaceful we will win over some of the police. It’s time they listen.”

“Are you supporting us? Are you joining a protest near you in Egypt or abroad to support us?”

The model of social media for information sharing allows sharing information from many people to many people. Butler et al. (2001) highlighted how “the Internet offers a variety of technical tools and mechanisms to support online social interaction in groups, ... and support the group’s interactions with the outside world” (p. 4). As such, the interactions that took place within social media sites helped to increased efficiency and effectiveness of decisions making process during social movement days. With the online social tools, groups can form and organize without the previous restrictions of time, space, and cost (Shirky 2008). Furthermore, social media enable to raise the awareness of the local struggle globally, and establish advocates in other nations to create public pressure to change polices. It provides the capabilities of spreading information, not only faster but further, enabling the movement’s participants to reach a larger and more geographically diverse audience easily and in real time (Joseph 2012). Real-time update postings on social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube, allowed to connect protest participants but also to draw in citizens from across the globe.

“It is really important that we can hear this in real time...When the Berlin Wall went up I watched the suppression of the people on tv...I saw a person killed, while trying to get over the wall...that image is embedded in my psyche forever...”

The Outcome: National Political Change

Political change can be viewed as a special kind of diffusion (Rogers 1996). When new political idea are invented, defused, and adopted the political change occurs. According to Rogers (1996) political change is “the process by which an alternative occur” (p. 7). On February 11, 2011, Egyptian revolution was succeeded to overthrowing Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian President for the past three decade, only after 18 days of demonstration. Moreover, the country has gone into a transitional phase of political development toward a more democratic form of government to replace the tyrannical and authoritarian regime in Egypt. The substantial role of sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube during the 2011 Cairo revolts highlights their powerful impact in national political change. The link between online social movement and national political change is evident from the big success of the 2011 Cairo revolts. As stated by Tapscott (2011) “if Twitter, Facebook and YouTube didn’t exist, Hosni Mubarak would still be president of Egypt” (para. 2). Within minutes of Mubarak’s resignation a spread of tweets like “This is a classic revolution of the 21st Century. A momentous event. Khaled Said and others who had fallen, did not die in vain. Egypt will be in good hands. Congratulations.”

Conclusion

Despite 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), the link between information technologies and social movements for political change has barely begun to be explored. Past research in this area has treated sudden changes in regulation, law, and even norms and values as exogenous and has generally ignored the role that IS play in engineering and leveraging such changes. This research in contrast moves from surface observations and points the initial conditions and antecedent actions underlying the process that give rise to those events. Moreover, we highlight the utility of process analysis as a qualitative approach for understating social media role in online activism and social movement and addressing complexity underline the process of social and political change. It is also important to point out the double-edged sword nature of social media impact on the movement development. For instance, social media can easily facilitate oppressions and create new risks of repressive surveillance. Clearly, there is still much to learn about IS impact on the process of social movement development. The stages outlined in our research provide a step toward an enhanced understating of social and political change. The ultimate purpose of this study is to lay the foundation for much needed research on the role of social media in political engagement, 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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