The impact of social media in the Arab springs

Interim report

Nathan Horner

This report provides a background into the Arab spring. It also contains a detailed explanation of what in Lehman's terms are "Social Media" and the different ways it can be used. This report will also contain insight into the social media and the Arab springs, this information was derived from online sources and journals. The conclusion of the report contains evaluations of 5 countries within the Arab spring and lays out an approach for the final report.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Social media is merely seen as the applications over 1 billion people use worldwide, but what is it really? This report provides a full explanation of the meaning of social media and its contributing factors. The report documents the findings from the research of the Arab spring. The report summarises the findings from the research documenting how social media was used, the events and the government action in the following Arab spring countries; Bahrain, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Syria. This information was derived from a variety of sources ranging from journals, newspaper articles and electronic sources. This information provides the conclusion of the main uses of social media in the chosen Arab spring countries. This report also highlights which country in the Arab spring had the biggest social media presence during December 2010 to January 2012. This was accomplished through a variety of data sources mainly from the Dubai school of business' Arab spring social media report [7]. From the research carried out in the report an approach was outlined for the final report.

Background – So what is Social Media?

For years the people of the MENA regions were plighted by poverty and poor conditions which were inflicted upon them by their respective governing bodies. However in December 2010 the people of those nations had had enough and fought back against their governments, taking to the streets to protest for all to see. Their main aim was to gain more global awareness of the troublesome times each nation has endured under their fearless leaders. Their means of doing so, social media

What is social media?
Social media is best understood as a group of new kinds of online Media, which share most or all of the following characteristics:

Participation
Social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is Interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.

Openness
Most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on.

Conversation
Whereas traditional media is about "broadcast" (content transmitted or distributed to an audience) social media is better seen as a two-way conversation.

Community
Social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue or a favourite TV show.

Connectedness
Most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources and people.

Types of social media
Many people only acknowledge applications such as Facebook and Twitter, but social media comes in many forms, many of which users don't associate with social media.

Social Networks
Sites such as Facebook, Bebo and MySpace allow users to share content, converse and connect with friends and build their own web page for all to see

Blogs

Web pages where users write online journals with the latest appearing first, most common misconception is that social networks is the most associate form of social media however this is not the case Blogs are most associated, and example of blogs is Tumblr.

Wikis

These websites allow people to add information or delete and append information, acting as a communal document or database. The best-known wiki is Wikipedia, which is referred to as the online encyclopaedia.

Podcasts

Where audio or video files created by anybody can be downloaded for free by any users subscribing to the podcast. Most common application where this is used is iTunes.

Forums

Websites set up for users to discuss interests and specific topics. Forums preceded social media and are popular in content communities.

Content Communities

Communities, which organise and share particular kinds of content. The most popular content communities tend to form around photos (Flickr), bookmarked links (del.icio.us) and videos (YouTube).

Micro blogging

Social networking combined with bite-sized blogging, where small amounts of content ('updates') are distributed online and through the mobile phone network. Twitter is the clear leader in this field. [1]

To many people who reside in the western part of the world, social media is merely deemed as applications such as Facebook and twitter however its real meaning goes deeper.
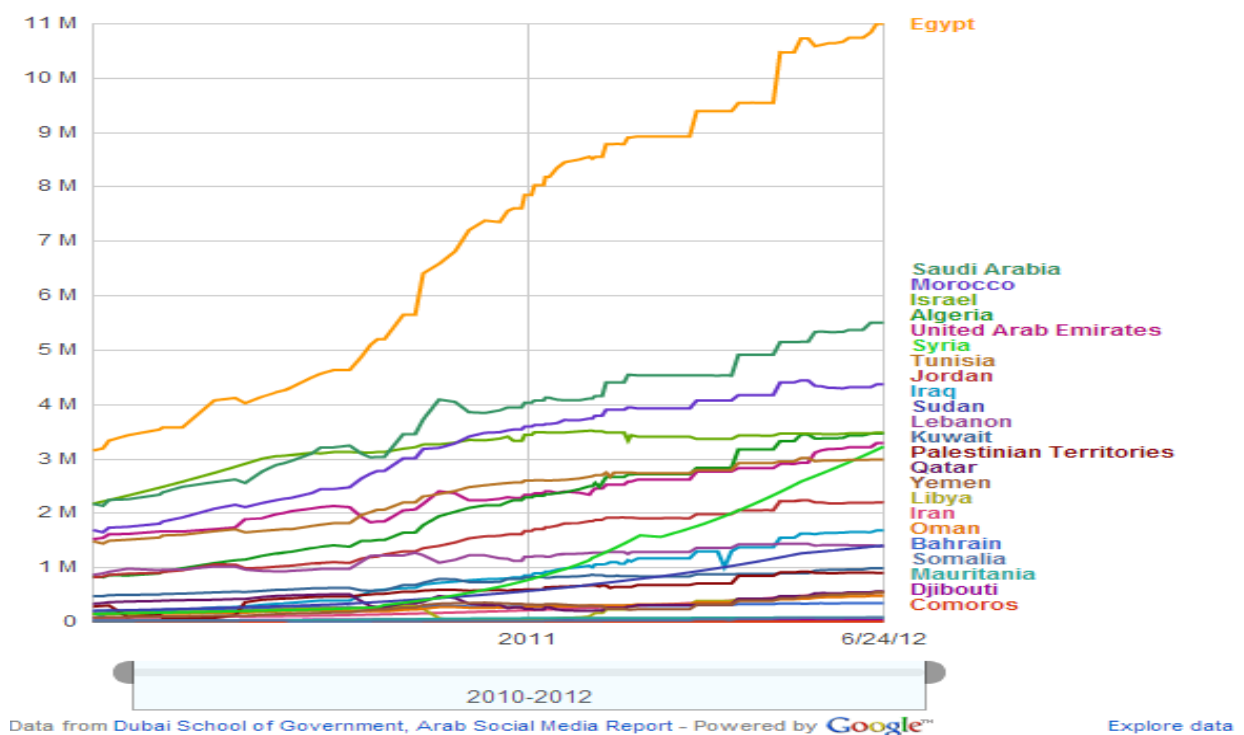
Background

I have reviewed previous findings on this topic and identified ways that social media was used in the Arab spring which is not the traditional way of using social. [2] As this issue is still an ongoing topic I feel that the best way is to concentrate on the top 3 countries where social media was at its highest usage rate, I intend to do this for both Facebook and Twitter. After extensive research I found that these two forms of social media were the ones with the highest amount of users during the Arab Spring. See in fig.1 (below during the Arab spring time frame). As you can see from fig.1 below the top 3 countries with the most Facebook users are Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Morocco. However after analysing the data I found that apart from Egypt the country with the biggest surge in Facebook users was Syria.

I feel that it would be more beneficial to the project if I choose to focus on the following countries; Egypt, Morocco and Syria. In fig.2 I have gone through the same process showed in figure.1 but for Twitter. From the data I was able to deduce that the clear top 3 in which I will be focussing on in respect to Twitter are as follows; Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain. [7]

Although I have stipulated that I intend to focus on Facebook and twitter I will also comment briefly on the other forms of social media that were used throughout the Arab spring, I intend to do this within the final year report. [7]

Fig.1

Source: Dubai School of Government, Arab Social Media Report, Permanent link:
http://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=z2kg90qa3mgc2e_&ctype=l&strail=false&bcs=d&nselm=h&met_y=facebookuser&fdim_y=age_group:13%26above&scale_y=lin&ind_y=false&rdim=country&idim=country:DZ:BH:KM:EG:DJ:IQ:IR:IL:JO:KW:LB:MR:LY:MA:OM:PS:QA:SA:SO:SD:TN:SY:AE:YE&ifdim=country&tstart=1271804400000&tend=1340492400000&hl=en_US&dl=en_US&ind=false&icfg

Fig.2

Number of Active Twitter users

Data from Dubai School of Government, Arab Social Media Report – Powered by Google™   Explore data

Research Findings

Egypt

Events

"A young Internet executive called Wael Ghoneim helped organize a call for a demonstration for 25 January 2011 in Cairo's Tahrir Square through a Facebook page entitled We Are All Khaled Siad. Fifty thousand people came, not just the dedicated hard core, but fresh faces, old and young. They came back the next day, and the next and the next, swelling to millions, and the rest is history."[2]

25th January 2011 was the definitive day in Egypt's struggle against president Mubarak when protesters gathered in Tahrir square, thousands came to stand up and be counted for in the rise against the regime. Once the protests were in full swing it took just 18 days for Egypt's current president, Mubarak to resign (12 February 2011). Many Egyptians felt his resignation was long overdue as he was seen as a tyrannous and repressive leader. However

this was not Egypt's first attempt at revolt, over the past decade it has been reported that that around 3 thousand worker led protests took place, this is a clear indication of Mubarak's regime was not welcomed by the public [3]. Unemployment is rife throughout Egypt especially in the youth demographic; the nation is simply unable or unwilling to provide jobs even to university graduates. Egypt also has a history of using social media to organize strikes, in 2008 a 27 year old woman by the name of Ezra Abdel Fattah, set a Facebook group enticing people to participate in a worker strike on the 6th April 2008 at a textile mill in Nile delta. The Facebook group attracted over 70000 members, which was 10% of the Facebook population in Egypt at the time [4]. Many politicians then believed that Facebook had enough power as an organizational tool to cause problems for the regime [5]. However despite the relative success of the "April 6" Facebook group Facebook or any form of social media was not used again as an organizational tool or anything relate to politics for 2 years. Then in June 2010 Facebook was used as a remembrance group paying homage to Khaled Said, spreading the word of the young bloggers untimely demise. The Facebook group "we are all Khaled Said" set up by Google's middle east marketing director Wael Ghoneim attracted over 500,000 members. The reason for Khaled Said death was because he had obtained and posted incriminating video footage of Egyptian police officers. The page set up by Wael Ghoneim eventually warranted for his arrest. [6].
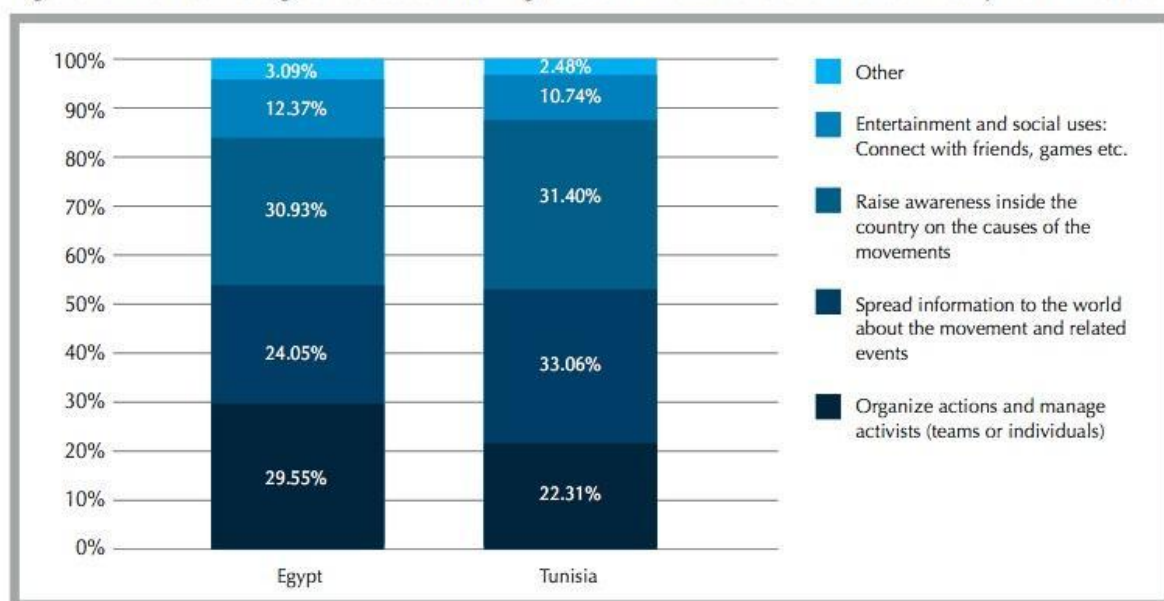
Social Media Uses

Social media had 3 main uses in Egypt, the first being as an organizational tool. Many accredited social media and in particular Egypt for the rapid progression in overthrowing the government. This accelerated speed was down to the efficient use of social media networks as a form of organizational infrastructure through virtual networks both online and offline. The Egyptian activists were able to capitalize on the many to many relationships both Facebook and twitter employed when dealing with their communications. With the current speed at which such information can be transferred and shared is almost instantaneously and has now become a common characteristics of social media and is why so many tend to use it. Facebook groups set up by activists were commonly used as platforms to attract like minded individuals to join the group and share their thoughts and grievances on the topic associated with the current regime. Facebook also acted as a platform for potential protesters to network with other groups e.g. "we are all Khaled Said" and "April 6 movement" could communicate with each other to share their struggles. It is the same idea in life that if you know of someone who is going to an event then you yourself are more likely to go, this was the case when it came to the protest groups, it allowed users to find out if they knew anyone who would be protesting and then decide if they were to join also. Once the protest activity became reinforcing meaning that the interest increased without further help by the organizers then a date was set to protest. Word of mouth carried the news of protest to the offline communities their main source for doing this was through Taxi drivers who are notorious talkers.

Social media was also used as an alternative press in Egypt, this was possible because of the low entry barriers social media application provide, making social media a solid platform for citizen journalism. Citizen journalism was widely used to report the event on the ground, uploading media content (audio, video, visual). The information being relaying by people on social media applications was of so much worth that mainstream media outlets were using what users in their segments. It allowed media outlets a play by play or live feed of the

events and goings on during the protests. What the citizen journalists wrote was often contradicted and shunned by many media outlets because they were government run. Twitter was also widely used during the riots both as an alternative press and as a way to awareness. Many people who were taking part in the protest tweeted messages enticing their compatriots to participate in the movement. Over 1091 tweets were sent during the start of the protest on 25th January 2011, tagged with the date #25jan and #Egypt during the protest

Social media was also an invaluable tool to great awareness of the strife within the MENA regions and internationally. A survey by the Arab social media report in Egypt found that the majority of Facebook users felt that Facebook was the most effective way of raising awareness within the country [7]. (See figure below). It allowed everyone on that social media application to find out about the troubles people faced against their government. Due to the six degrees of separation that widely occurs throughout Facebook and twitter, meaning that every user is less than 6 steps away from any other person in the world making a "friend of a friend" chain. This is how other countries around the world were made aware of the unease in Egypt and the Arab spring. This way of which social media was used in the Arab spring was very much unintentional and more of a byproduct of them using social media as an organizational tool.

Figure 7: The Main Usage of Facebook during the Civil Movement and Events in Early 2011 was to:

(Source: http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Facebook/LineChart.aspx?&PriMenuID=18&CatID=24&mnu=Cat)

Government Actions

The government had a delicate role to play throughout the Arab spring, they had to stay loyal to the current president (Mubarak) but also reassure the Egyptian people that all was well. This was until the people revolted and protested the regime. The governments first course of action was to arrest all known cyber activists one of them being Google' own middle east marketing director Wael Ghoneim, they thought that by cutting the head off the proverbial snake then the body will die. This was not the case if anything the movement garnered more followers and momentum with Ghoneim' arrest. As the activist's social media powerhouse garnered more followers the government could do little to stop it. When the protest went ahead on the 25th January 2011 it was not met with a peaceful greeting by the security forces employed by the government, tear gas and brute force was used on the 26th January was deployed in an attempt to disperse the riot, however this too failed with the Egyptian people showing resilience but over 25 people lost their lives with over 1000 people injured in the clash. The government then realized the Egyptian people were using social media to communicate so they took action to cut off the Internet on the 27th January 2011 in an attempt to severe contact between the protesters. This was in vein and the Internet link was restored on the 2nd of February 2011[8]. Eventually the protest was deemed a success at the time with the presidents opting to resign on the 12th February. However to this day the protests are still taking place over the continuing power struggle that remains in Egypt.

The following extract from the interview highlighted what the people of Egypt thought social media was used for and its prospective success within the region. It also provides insight into the government standing on the situation and their dealings. Researchers in Dubai were able to provide better insight into how social media influenced the Arab spring movement; the following conversation highlights their response to the questions asked by Arabic Knowledge@Wharton (AKW) (2012) in relation to Egypt are as follows:

> "AKW: There has been a divergence in how the Arab Spring has played out in the region. Has that resulted too in a regional divergence of approach and use of social media?"

> FS (Fadi Salem): Not necessarily, in my view. There has been a divergence in the Arab Spring, but online, the spill over effect is between all these countries. It is not confined to one geographic location. So people who are using social media in the United Arab Emirates are actually very influential in Egypt. Egyptians are influential in Tunisia, and so on. They are taking part of these movements online, effectively becoming members of it. It is like this Pan-Arabism online, but it is not an ideology. It is more of a sense of unity among the online population. Another surprising outcome from the last survey, and we have even seen this in the most recent survey we have done, that social media has an equalizing factor among men and women. They have the same reaction to issues, for instance related to women. But it is not the case

offline, where they have different opinions. It is the same case even among users between different geographic locations. You would see more or less people thinking the same way across the region. You get almost the same reaction to everything you ask. People who use social media across the region have almost identical points of view towards many things. It is definitely not the case among those who do not use social media among these countries.

RM (Racha Mourtada): It seems to have a homogenizing effect; it brings people to the same points of view.

"AKW: Is there a differentiation across the Arab world, as far as government reaction and response?"

FS: In the past year it has become clear that some countries -- and this is changing in some countries over the year -- but there were clearly at the beginning of 2011 some governments whose reaction was to pull the kill switch, stop the Internet, stop social media, criminalize it, monitor it, and block it. So that was the first reaction of many countries. But the reaction by the public that was created in certain countries made many governments think again. For example, in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, people said that cutting the Internet was a positive thing, because it made them be active offline, not just online. That reaction made many governments in the region realize that blocking or cutting the Internet or access to social media is not the right way, because the cost would be higher. Since then, governments have been changing to a more subtle regulation. They monitor, they take things case by case, and they do not publicize reactions, unless it is a national security issue or a criminal issue that then goes to court. We have seen that, and I believe that will continue to be a trend, not only in the Arab world, but globally as well.

AKW: With the elections in Egypt, how have political parties approached social media?

FS: All political movements since last year have been quick to jump on the bandwagon and use social media, or different platforms of social media, to push their message or agenda. Whether you are government, semi-government or opposition, you are on social media trying to influence discussions. It is the young population you are targeting, and the growth is huge. So you might as well be there as soon as you can to influence the political agenda, like in Egypt. This core group is influential, not necessarily because they do things. They might not be the ones who voted in Egypt, but they definitely influenced the vote.

RM: Even in countries without an Arab Spring effect – Kuwait. For instance, surprised us with the number of Twitter users and tweets, and I used to ask Kuwaitis why. It turns out the parliament is very active on Twitter and they make up the bulk of what

is going on there, and people do interact with them. It is a very active political scene, but not in the revolutionary sense. (***See appendix for full transcript***)

Bahrain

Events

Many consider Bahrain a modern and reasonable country; but that assumption is made by many who merely look into the nation the people who reside there feel differently. The people of Bahrain felt they were being discriminated by the government especially in relation to the Shia majority (70% of the population). The Shia people feel that the Sunni monarchical regime was providing poor education, housing and employment opportunities [10]. The al-Khalifa family in power in Bahrain are of Sunni descent; the Sunni are the minority (30% of the population) in Bahrain so the monarchy treat the Shia as second class citizens and ostracize them. Tens of thousands of people gathered around the pearl roundabout on the 14th February 2011, however it was met with fierce military opposition, they even fired upon mourners during a protesters funeral. Things turned lethal when protester were killed, violence ensued for over a month, soldiers from Saudi Arabia stepped in to disperse the protests and eventually on 18th March 2011 the rebellion was destroyed. The clamp down on people involved with the movement continued with anyone who aided with the protest was to be either trial and imprisoned or exiled from Bahrain [11].

Social media Uses

Bahrain is considered to be a technologically advanced county with Internet penetration at a high along with smartphone usage means social media is rife in the country. Unlike in Egypt where facebook was widely used to raise awareness, Bahrain used content sharing websites such as YouTube to raise awareness of the anti government movement. Facebook was also used throughout Bahrain by leaders of the protest as an organisational tool but also to advertise the government misgivings and to depict how they were being treated in a peaceful protest.[6] Thousands of videos were uploads showing police brutality and the unnecessary use of teargas throughout the protest victims. This had the same by product that Egypt obtained in gaining global awareness of the trouble in their nation. Twitter' main use within Bahrain was to report attacks on the protesters when they happened and login their location to their tweet. Facebook like many other Arab nations was used to organise the protests, using Facebook groups to attract users and set dates when to protests, they were run by a number of people. Twitter was used to report the violence as it happened; this is a form of citizen journalism. It was also used to report injuries that occurred throughout the protests, this enabled the emergency services and doctors helping in the protests to tend to the injured quickly knowing their location form the tweet [17]

Government Actions

The Bahrain government were able to take advantage of social media to locate the people responsible for the protests. The government set up their own page appealing to facebook users to oust the protesters, they did this by setting up the facebook group "Together to Unmask the Shia Traitors" identities of those involved were soon matched and noted. Aljazeera stated that the government used social media to solicit information from the public, with the facebook groups being virtual lynch mobs. The way in which the government can use social media as Bahrain did epitomises the double-edged sword that it can be in locating the users and turning their friends against them. Protesters can utilise facebook to create awareness and organise protests but government can use it locate those involved and brand them outcasts. In Bahrain's case people found were often tortured, killed or forced to apologise on national television for their actions [13].

Syria

Events

Syria situation is still ongoing with its government as I write this report, for the amount of effort the Syrian people have put in, they have seen little return. The al Assad regime has not shown any sign of faltering under the continued pressure from the people of Syria. In March 2011 in a city in Syria called Dar'aa few high school students painted on the school wall some sentences against the president " Bashar al Assad " and his regime and then somehow the police were informed about that, so they came in the school and arrested the kids and took them to unknown place. So the families start looking for their kids and when they couldn't get hold of them, they went to the internal forces asking where are their kids but they were asked to go back home and to forget about the kids. [4] Then the whole families and relatives gathered and started a protest at the city hall one week after that, the kids were released and signs of torture were on their bodies. So because of the government's tyranny, they protested again and it expanded in every and each Syrian city calling for a freedom and justice but unfortunately Al Assad's forces started to shoot, kill, arrest and kidnap any one they could catch among the protester. The people are refusing to give up and so is the government who is supported by Iran, Russia and few more countries. Whereas the protests in Egypt were greeted with peace from the government officials, the protests in Syria were met with violence, many protesters have lost their lives and many people have questioned whether there is much point in continuing the protest against the Syrian government. According to Reuters (2012) [14] over 30000 protesters have lost their lives to the Syrian military from the start date of the protests to present.

Social Media Uses

Social media was mostly used in the same way as Egypt used it organise, attract awareness and citizen journalism in relation to the general public protests. However in Syria it was a

unique case because there was so much bloodshed during the protests that there was a need for protection, so the rebel forces needed to use social media to their advantage.

In Syria social media had its many uses, one of them being fundraising. Social media allowed Syrian rebels to raise the funds they needed to bring the protest to the government; it also allowed private funders to be involved in overthrowing the government in Syria. The fundraising effort was run by 2 young sheikhs by the name of hajaj al-ajmi and irshid al-hajri, their main aim was to arm the free Syria army and rebel to overthrow the government as they foresaw that protesting alone would not be enough. They both noted that they used twitter to plead with their followers to donate funds to the cause many of them retweeting the message for more to see, they boast over 120000 followers. Twitter also allowed them to target potential donors in Saudi Arabia where the government had cut ties with the private networks there. One of their tweets pleading for donations was retweeted over 1500 times. Social media allowed them to appeal to all nations opposing the current Sunni regime. Rebels also used YouTube to post thank you messages to the donors for helping their causes. [23]

Social media was also widely used for self-promotion to establish themselves as serious players, in the defence of the Syrian people. The rebel groups used them to promote their cause and attract potential followers to join the cause. An example of this is the where there is someone dedicated to monitoring the social media outlets posting reports and interviews on their facebook page in an attempt to shape the public's opinion of them, providers to the public and cementing their reputation as a military force that is needed to overthrow the current government.

Social media was also used by the Syrian rebels as during combat operations, if looking at the Local coordination communities (LCC) facebook pages, pictures and videos were posted showing the location of the enemy and asking other rebels in certain areas to help those caught in gunfire. Twitter facebook and YouTube were strategic communication tools deployed by the rebels to raise funds, trade tactics and publicise their roles in the effort to overthrow the government. Social media has enabled the certain rebel groups to gain popular following beyond their area. [14]

Government Actions
Initially the Syrian government had openly stated that they would not limit their citizen's access to the Internet and social media applications. However just 3 months after making that statement the Syrian government cracked down on the usage of the internet within the country. Anyone who was arrested by the Syrian government during the protest were demanded to hand over their facebook account passwords so they could not be used again. The government also resorted to turning off the countries 3G services during peak times of the protests; this limited the use of social media on smart phones during these times so that protesters could not record the protest goings on and upload them to social media sites. Government supporters are also taking to various social media platforms to try and oust

those using social media against the government, they dubbed themselves the Syrian electronic army. Instead of turning off the countries internet like the Egyptian government opted to do, the Syrian government were more strategic. They decided to turn off the electricity and telephone services in areas that have the most unrest and activity. Dr. Radwan Ziadeh, director of Damascus centre for human rights (2011) states that "they are using these tactics to cut off communication for the people, two of my close friends had their facebook pages hacked and are now featuring conspicuous pro government messages." The government have also resorted to creating accounts falsely supported by the white house and Oprah displaying pro regime messages. However the Syrian electronic army who tell their followers to attack protester accounts had their account shut down by facebook as it violated their terms of service. [15]

Morocco

Events

The Moroccan people had previously experienced a number oftyrannous reigns under various kings, but the current king, King Mohammed VI attempted to gain more political freedom, which was welcomed by some. However many felt that this was a very slow process and the younger generation wanted a more British style monarchy in which the king only had ceremonial powers. On the 20th February 2011 the protest began in Casablanca and Rabat. Unlike Syria the protests within morocco reform were peaceful and on the day more than 30000 took to the street of Rabat all calling for political. However there were many false starts many protests were cancelled, this was due to the governments use of social media to foil plots and send out false messages whilst posing as protesters.[16]

Social Media Uses

Morocco could not rely on the mainstream media for any sort of support during their uprising because of the distress in Libya consumed a majority of their airtime, but also because the government controlled many of the media outlets. As a result they took to social media to garner support for the movement and to entice the people to stand up and be counted. Social media in morocco was primarily on the YouTube and facebook and Twitter platforms, many of the younger generation uploaded videos of what they disliked about the current regime to YouTube to attract the public attention. They listed the lack of job opportunities, education, equality and the current political set up as some of the reasons for concern with the government. They opted to use twitter and facebook in the same way as many Arab spring countries did (citizen journalism and organisational tool). They began to gain momentum, and social media was able to break through the cultural and political barriers. Twitter was used in morocco to talk about the impending protests, this was deemed to be an attempt to try and raise awareness. During the protests, Moroccan people like many other Middle Eastern people opted to use the more versatile form of social

media (Twitter) to provide the rest of the population a play by play account of the protest.[18][13]

Government

The Moroccan government chose to communicate with the protesters on Facebook mainly as a pre-emptive precaution, asking the protesters if there was a resolution that they could put in place and to advice against protesting. Just days before the protest, the minister of youth and sports contacted the protesters via their Feb 20 movement asking for dialogue instead of violence. The minister also had ulterior motive in that he was trying to protect the current regime, blaming foreign actors for the unrest, he felt that foreign influences wanted to weaken the country. The government also used social media to urge citizens to stay at home and not go out in the protest. [9]

Tunisia

Events

Many people believe that the events that occurred in Tunisia sparked the Arab spring chain of events. It all started when an unemployed university graduate by the name of Mohamed Bouazizi who had turned to selling vegetables to make a living had all of his produce confiscated from him by the police. He decided to set fire to himself in a political statement and later dies from his injuries. This sparked mass protests within Tunisia mainly by the younger generation in the same position Mohamed Bouazizi was calling for more job opportunities within the country. 10 days later the Tunisian president vows to punish those rioting but at the same time ensuring the peaceful protesters that job opportunities will be made for them. Over the coming days violence thrived in the capitol with police clashing with protesters, costing the lives of 11 protesters. On the 14th January 2011 after a month of protest the president of Tunisia fled the country with the prime minister taking over the country; however the Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi also resigns after just 5 weeks in charge amid the continuing violence between protesters and police. On the 9th march 2011 the high court rules that the political party that was spearheaded by the former president be dissolved, many people celebrated this ruling. [20]

Social media uses

Many people believe that social media sped up the process in Tunisia; many feel that without social media applications such as facebook and twitter they would still be fighting against the government. Like many other countries within the Arab spring Tunisia used facebook to organise protests by creating facebook groups and pages. However as Tunisia was first in the Arab spring revolution it set the standard for everyone else to follow. Tunisia also used facebook to post photos and videos of the way the government treated the people of Tunisia. This was how they managed to create awareness within the country but like so many others, they raised awareness globally. As the protests went on the Tunisian government stopped newsgroups reporting the story, this forced the Tunisian people to use

twitter and other social media platforms to report the goings on during the protests effectively becoming citizen journalists. Many of their messages were sued across various media outlets to find out what exactly was going on in those areas. This became an effective tool to further outline the government's misgivings whilst protesting. [19][20]

Government Actions

The Tunisian government like Syria made the mistake of assuming that the protests were of a violent nature, this was not the case. The Tunisian government still resorted to combating the protesters with violence and many deaths occurred as a result. Since Tunisia was the first country to go through this, it was unsure of the protocols to follow and was very much blind throughout the uprising. Tunisia failed to recognise the importance of Facebook during the protests I found it unusual that they took action to block access to most social media sites except Facebook. It wasn't until they realised Facebook' potential that they felt the need to harass those posting anti-government remarks. They would redirect users to a fake log in page in an attempt to retrieve their passwords. The government also resorted to torturing any bloggers who post ill things toward the regime in Tunisia and would deny that any action ever took place when questioned. Tunisia eventually took measures to block the use of Facebook by displaying a "404 error message" when users would go onto the Facebook page essentially censoring the web in Tunisia. [21]

Conclusion

To conclude I have identified that social media has been used in a variety of ways relative to each Arab spring country but its 3 main uses were to:

- Raising Awareness both in the country and Globally
- Organisational tool
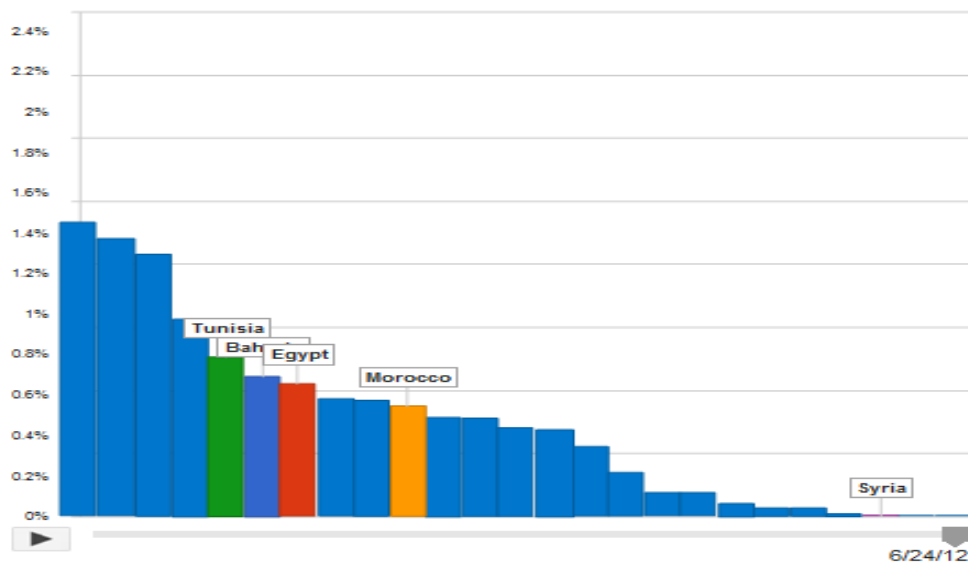- Citizen Journalism and alternative press

I did not intend on finding this information out within this report because I anticipated that it would be more difficult to gather the information, however this was not the case and as a result I have included all of the findings within this report. I decided to focus my research onto certain countries relative to their importance to the topic, information available and data analysis on each countries social media presence:

1. Egypt – this country was chosen because it was one of the most highly talked about movements within the Arab spring thus making the data collection and research on this country easier than most.
2. Morocco – this country was chosen because it had the third highest rise in facebook users behind Egypt and Saudi Arabia. (it is important to note that I
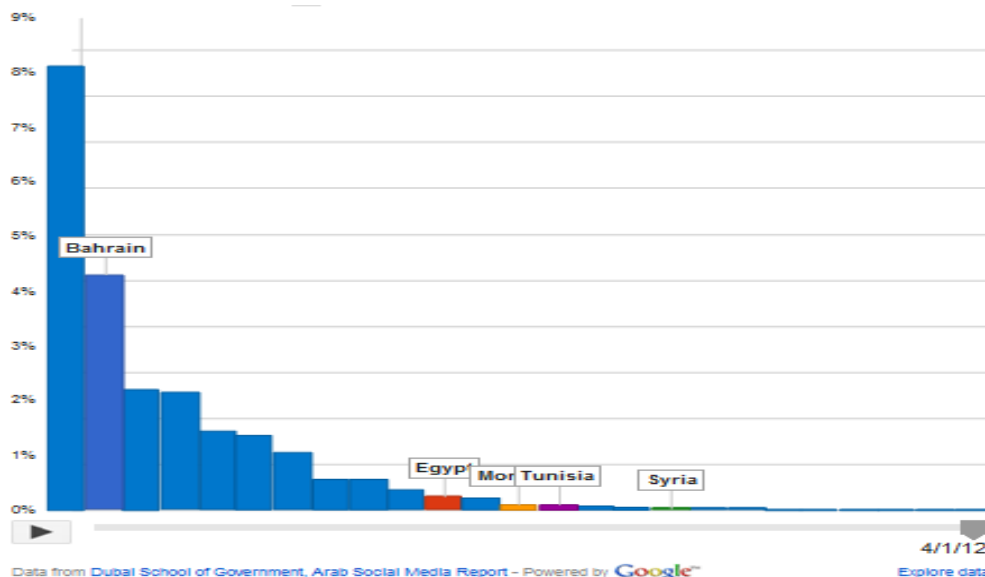
decided against using Saudi Arabia because there was little information on the movement and it is still an ongoing movement with little success(

3. Tunisia- this country was chosen because it was the first movement within the Arab spring before it was even dubbed the Arab spring. I felt it was important to highlight that it was the first country so had no model or template to go from on how and what to use social media for.

4. Bahrain- this country was chosen because it highlighted clearly the way in which twitter was used and had the 3rd highest twitters users behind Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

5. Syria – this country was chosen because it was the most controversial movements, in a sense that many died for their cause. This is important so the mistake could be highlighted providing a how not to guide.

Facebook penetration in the chosen countries compared to others in the MENA region. [7]

Twitter penetration in the chosen countries compared to the remaining MENA regions [7]

Approach

Initially I intended to identify the uses of social media within countries residing in the Arab spring area in the final report. I decided this because I thought that it would be difficult to derive such data and information in the time period provided, as a result I have included how social media was used in 5 countries within the Arab spring within this report. From looking at the background on the chosen countries within the Arab spring I have highlighted the following issues. The ways in which the government handled the situations within the Arab spring needs to be questioned. I intend to further analyse how each government coped with the protests and provide my recommendations on how to control the protests without breaching the protester civil rights and how to deal with social media during those riots. From the background research I have been able to identify what form of social media was most commonly used throughout the Arab spring, I can then use this information to model the rise in that social media platform in I-think in those countries and then depict how the information travelled from each country. I will also construct influence diagrams for each country and use them to highlight the mistakes both parties (government and public) made during the protests, this information can then be used to provide recommendations for the final report. I also intend to comment on the overall success of each chosen country I have commented on, highlighting the success and failures of the use of social media in relation to the Arab spring. I also intend to carry out further research in the worldwide perception of the Arab spring and whether the world considers the Arab spring a success and whether the world feels that social media was a part of the success. I also feel that it may provide better insight if I were to interview PHD students within the university who have family members in the countries residing in the Arab spring, I feel it would be beneficial if I found out if conditions have changed in the countries and get their perspective on the social media revolution. I feel that in by showing the link between the number of social media users and protester opposition would clearly show if the government is reacting to the physical protest presence of the digital presence. I will also deduce how the majority of countries in the Arab spring used their social media applications for what use and if using social media for that use was a success. As mentioned previously I also intend to produce influence diagrams on the event that occurred for each country, this will be derived from the timeline of events that will be constructed in the final report. From this I will be able to highlight errors made by both parties involved (protesters & government). From this information I will be able to derive recommendations for both parties as to how to control such issues in relation to social media in the Arab spring without the amount of chaos that ensued with it.

References

[1] Mayfield, A, 2008. What is social media? icrossing, [Online]. Available at: http://www.icrossing.co.uk/fileadmin/uploads/eBooks/What_is_Social_Media_iCrossing_ebook.pdf [Accessed 04 December 2012].

[2] Johnny West, 2011. Karama!: Journeys Through the Arab Spring. 1st Edition. Quercus.pp.145.

[3] Tarek Masoud, "The Road to (and from) Liberation Square," Journal of Democracy 22: 2011, pp. 21.

[4] Hofheinz, A (2011). Nextopia? Beyond Revolution 2.0 . International Journal of Communication. ISSN 1932-8036. 5, s 1417- 1434

[5] David Faris, "Revolutions Without Revolutionaries? Network Theory, Facebook, and the Egyptian Blogosphere," Arab Media and Society 2008, 2.

[6] Kurt Anderson, "The Protester," Time 14 December, 2011, Accessed 15 December, 2011. Available at: http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373,00.html

[7] Arab Social Media Report, 2011, Dubai School Of Government, vol no, 1, issue 2, pp6

[8] Arab spring: an interactive timeline of Middle East protests | World news | guardian.co.uk. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[9] Jadaliyya Reports, In the Arab World, Social Media Has Fast Developed into a Medium for the Masses [Online]. Arab Studies Institute, Available at: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7008/in-the-arab-world-social-media-has-fast-developed- [accessed: 2 December 2012]

[10] "Bahrain mourners call for end to monarchy." The Guardian, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/18/bahrain-mourners-call-for-end-to-monarchy

[11] "Bahrain accused of systematic attacks on doctors." The Guardian, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/22/bahrain-accused-attacks-doctors

[12] Sysomos Blog. 2012. January 2011. [ONLINE] Available at: http://blog.sysomos.com/2011/01/ . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[13] The impact of social media on social unrest in the Arab spring, Taylor Dewey, Juliane Kaden, Mariam Marks, Shun Matsushima, Beijing Zhu, March 20, 2012, Stanford university, California.

[14] Syrian death toll now tops 30,000: activist group | Reuters. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/26/us-syria-crisis-toll-idUSBRE88P12Y20120926 . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[15] Syria Cracks Down on Social Media - NYTimes.com. 2012. Syria Cracks Down on Social Media - NYTimes.com. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/23/world/middleeast/23facebook.html [Accessed 09 December 2012].

[16] How the Arab World Uses Facebook and Twitter [INFOGRAPHICS]. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://mashable.com/2012/06/08/arab-world-facebook-twitter/ .[Accessed 12 December 2012].

[17] Twitter used to report Bahrain violence, injuries as they happen - Technology on NBCNews.com. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.nbcnews.com/technology/technolog/twitter-used-report-bahrain-violence-injuries-they-happen-124976 . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[18] Use of twitter by the Feb20 movement in Morocco | Ramblings & Thoughts about random things that matter. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://lovop.com/en/use-of-twitter-by-the-feb20-movement-in-morocco/ . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[19] E.politics: online advocacy tools & tactics » How Social Media Accelerated Tunisia's Revolution: An inside View. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.epolitics.com/2011/02/10/how-social-media-accelerated-tunisias-revolution-an-inside-view/ . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[20] Tunisia protesters use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to help organize and report - latimes.com. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2011/01/tunisia-students-using-facebook-and-twitter-to-organize.html . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[21] The truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings in the Arab world | World news | The Guardian. 2012. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/25/twitter-facebook-uprisings-arab-libya . [Accessed 12 December 2012].

[22] Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, Freelon, S, H, M, J, D, 2012. New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring. Blog and Bullets, [Online]. 2, 12-22. Available at: http://www.usip.org/files/resources/PW80.pdf [Accessed 04 December 2012].

[23] Howard, P, Duffy, A, Freelon, D, Hussain, M, Mari, W, Mazaid, M. 2011. Opening Closed Regimes What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring? Project on Information Technology and Political Islam, [Online]. 1, 5-10. Available at: http://dl.dropbox.com/u/12947477/publications/2011_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid_pITPI.pdf [Accessed 01 December 2012].

Appendices

Kate Taylor. 2011. Arab Spring really was social media revolution. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.tgdaily.com/software-features/58426-arab-spring-really-was-social-media-revolution . [Accessed 01 November 12].

Arab Spring really was social media revolution

This source starts off by stating that the Arab spring was purely fuelled by social media. I don't think that they have taken into account the strenuous effort the public made in making the Arab spring a mere possibility. I do agree with Phillip Howard of Washington university when he stated that social media help raise the expectations of the Arab springs political success. I also agree with the statement made that social media was a critical part of their toolkit. They go on to show that any video posted to YouTube relating to the Arab spring went viral, but they neglect to mention the increased media presence that was a by-product from the viral videos and other forms of social media. They point out a good fact in saying that after the president s of Egypt and Tunisia respectively resign there were over 2000 tweets a day relating to the topic. They point out that this was quickly picked up by neighbouring countries. I also acknowledge the irony in the fact that as the governments attempted to control the social media usage it induced more public protests. I feel that they have failed to see that some of the regulatory measures were put in place as safety measures to protect the rest of the general public. I find the closing statement intriguing, they state "many dictators have political opposition but were fragmented, so through the use of social media the dictator's opposition became aligned and showed genuine solidarity and the ability to arrange demonstrations." This statement further exemplifies the effectiveness social media was in the Arab spring.

Rohan Talbot. 2012. Lebanon and the dark side of the Twitter Revolution. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/06/lebanon-dark-side-twitter-revolution . [Accessed 04 November 12].

Lebanon and the dark side of the Twitter revolution

I have failed to grasp the real aftermath of the Arab spring until reading this article. While many Arab spring countries saw protests have meaning to the rest of the public in Lebanon their protests were merely met with gunfire. The media outlets failed to broadcast any news on the current gun blazed capitol Tripoli so twitter users took the social media giant not just to find out any new updates but to vent their frustration at the lack of news the current media were presenting them with. I agree with the statement it makes that social media has provided many countries a platform to0 mobilize protests against corrupt governments. But that was not all it was used for take Tripoli for example, social media in Tripoli provided an excellent and vital information source throughout the mass panic off streams of gunfire within the city. I can also sympathize with the point that is made that social media could potentially prove to do more harm than good intense atmospheric countries (Lebanon).

Science Daily. 2011. New study quantifies use of social media in Arab spring. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110914161733.htm . [Accessed 04 November 12].

New study quantifies use of social media in Arab spring

This paper states how social media had a central role in shaping debates across the Arab springs, but i feel it played a more significant part in the success of the Arab spring as a whole. The paper goes onto agree with Phillip Howard of Washington. They go onto state how social media was not defined by jus 2 outlets (twitter and facebook) but a wider base including YouTube and blogs. The data shows how around the time of unrest users engaged in social media outlets had increased and the increase was quickly followed by physical protests and meetings. He goes onto say that people were drawn to the conversation of social uprising across reason, but is it fair in saying that people not just drawn across regions but across countries and continents? It goes onto to state the negative impact social media had in other areas in the Arab spring. Some people such as online activists used different forms of social media to force the public to discuss issues that were not mentioned in public in turn forcing governments to crack down and inadvertently causing more harm. I disagree with his statement when it says that social media was used for good here because i fell that it was only used to evoke a response from the government with the online activists knowing the outcome.

John Naughton. 2012. Tech giants have power to be political masters as well as our web ones. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/feb/26/internet-companies-power-politics-freedom . [Accessed 07 November 12].

Tech giants have power to be political masters as well as our web ones

This article looks at the Arab spring from the government point of view. It touches on internet censorship and surveillance. They make a bold statement in saying that social media giants are corporate sell outs willing to allow any government the means and equipment necessary to purchase surveillance kits on their software. I feel that this needs to be independently moderate but the approach to do this is very complex, you cannot tell a company what they can and can't sell, neither can you stop them being sold to governments. However there needs to be a moderator to determine what they buyer' intent is with the software, what are they going to use it for? However we return back to the century old stigma of whether it is fair to deny people their freedom of speech. Within the article Rebecca McKinnon makes an interesting point in saying that democracies need to stop tackling these sorts of problems unless they fully consider the long term ramifications. She also highlights the corporate power social media giant facebook had during the Arab spring when they were able to take down an Egyptian activist page because they deemed that they were not using their real names. I ask the question how they would know this. Did they violate the users privacy and blocked their freedom of speech by doing so?

The impact of social media on social unrest in the Arab spring

Dewey, Kaden, Marks, Matsushima, Zhu, TD, JK, MM, SM, BZ, 2012. The impact of social media on social unrest in the Arab spring. Defence Intelligence Agency. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

Within this paper the phrase green movement is used within its literature review. It was an event that took place in Iran which provides a good perspective of the use of social media for mass mobilization. It goes onto say how social media was used though a relatively new form at the time "twitters". It all stemmed from the nations 10th election when the widely supported candidate Mir-hossien mousavi failed to win the election. Many people started to question the integrity of the

election and cited foul play. This led to the candidate himself taking to social media to state his grievances. Within minutes his supporters too vented their frustrations many using the slogan "where's my vote?" However this escalated into mass protest and panic and an innocent bystander got hurt prompting the western world to acknowledge the matter. My question is why someone's untimely death justified the western world's response, why did they not comment on the fraudulent election. In the wake of this incident many pundits dubbed social media a liberation technology. From their qualitative findings they deduced that in Tunisia social media was an important tool for mobilizing protesters the most instrumental figures were deemed to be the unions and human rights groups. However in Egypt it was more of an online protest after a man was beaten to death for witnessing police corruption, they beat him to death. He took to facebook to spread the word of this corruption within the cities law enforcement and after his death his page continued to attract over 400,000 users. Another person who felt wronged by the government took to YouTube and facebook to entice others to protest with her. When she went to the protest site she was ejected, so she created a second video announcing that she intended to protest again. However she had help this time she collaborated with the previous examples facebook page to attract more people. This shows the utility of social media and how it bridged two communities to fight a common problem. they deem facebook users organization communities that can be easily contacted through the use of social media solidifying the fact that facebook was a also used as an recruitment tool, for people to take on board of problems within their country which they may of not heard of before. However in Yemen they state that social media proved ineffective in the mobilization of the youth movement protest because it failed to acknowledge the cultural and traditionalism of the tribal communities that reside within Yemen. Failure to acknowledge the pre existing tradition and organization with result in the failure of the movement. In Jordan social media managed to overcome indifferences within various protest groups finding common ground between them all allow them to take to the streets in unity to make their voices heard, broadening their base of support despite those differences. However the paper goes onto convey how in Bahrain the government used social media to their advantage during the protests by using it to find the leaders of the protest and prosecute them (cut the head of a snake kills the body). They branded them traitor and posted various videos and photos asking the general public for their help in apprehending the criminals. It states that the government used social media to solicit information from the public and a smear campaign to tarnish the names of all involved. This epitomises how social media should be seen by many as a double edged sword and food for thought for other activists. However in Syria the paper portrays how social and other ties have a factor in the protests success. The stronger the family or social tie then the more people feel the need to support it. However if those ties affect their business ties or have conflicting influences then the protest may fail to take off. However an interesting fact came to light as to how the government used social media, they took to social media to openly communicate with the protesters, asking them for a peaceful protest but also using it to abolish any pre-requisitions that it was their doing blaming foreign actors as the cause for the upset. The paper notes that the university of Washington carried out its own study which pinpointed twitter as the key figure in spreading information about the social unrest to the residing countries in the Arab spring, setting off a chain reaction of events that

Shiv Malik, Jack Shenker, Adam Gabbatt. 2011. Arab Spring anniversary: how a lost generation found its voice. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/16/arab-spring-year-of-protest . [Accessed 13 November 12].

Here the author describes how social media gave the people of the Arab spring a voice in a time when they were not heard by their governments. The author shows how from one act of non conformity buy one man in Tunisia and how it is connected to millions of people by social media. The author emphasises how social media has been used not just in the Arab spring but worldwide. But still acknowledges that the Arab spring was the platform and instilment of belief that everyone needed to rise up through animosity and tribulations and be heard and social media allowed them to do so. However the author describes the situation within the Arab spring as youth uprising, by doing this he fails to acknowledge the efforts of many other demographics involved in the uprising. Although in some parts of the east the revolution proved to be a success, but in others it is struggling and the author points out through a source from a troubled area that although the framework to use social media to revolt against government has been put in place there is not out and out leader driving this force. The author finishes off stating that many believe that the chance to make a difference has never been more in the public's grasp. Although the user has identified how much of a worldwide impact social media had, he fails to comment on the lives of the many lost as a result of the Arab spring. He fails to acknowledge that the people in the Arab countries are so immersed in the struggle with their governments that they are willing to die for their cause.

Interactive effects of networked publics and social media on transforming the public sphere: a survey of Iran's leaderless social media revolution.

This pap looks at the Arab spring form a government stand point and argues that governments need to command and control a mass military response to the leaderless revolution which allows citizens to use social media to coordinate protests. The paper talks about how social media applications like Facebook and twitter belittle internet filtering policies instilled by governments, effectively nullifying them. But i ask the question is that just censorship similar to that which communist countries like china and Korea use to feed their public with government approved worthless information?

The paper goes on to talk about the rise of the social media presence within eastern countries in 2009. The Iran presidential candidates were refused media coverage by the then president who subsequently used all of his media options. So it was up to the candidates to be creative in the way in which they advertised themselves to the public. They decided to use social media which at the time was a relatively new term especially in Iran. However all forms of social media was censored by the government 2 months prior to the election. Not only was the social media sites down but the government took the public's freedom of speech away for them for the election by censoring instant messaging services.

Starbird, Palen, KS, LP, (2012). How will the revolution be retweeted? Information diffusion and the 2011 Egyptian uprising. In Social Media in War and Crisis. Seattle, February 11-15 2012.

This paper goes into detail as to how twitter was used during the political uprising in Egypt. The brief description of the scenario is as follows; a mass disruption event with mass social and informational convergence. Mass protests against the autocratic government ensued on January 25 2011 and continued for 18 days until the Egyptian president's resignation. Social media was widely used in the early stages of the protests until the government learnt that social media was being used to organise and communicate during the protests, so the government took measures to stop this by cutting the internet access to major providers the same day the riot started. However this effort to thwart the protests social media presence as the internet service was restored on the2nd February 2011. This is

the turning point of the protest; supporters of the president took matters into their own hands using unnecessary force to disperse the protest. The researchers then go into detail outlining the key messages that were retweeted during the protest. Users would often voice their opinion on the topic followed by memorable hash tags that were used by many. The most common hash tags used during the protests were; (1) #25jan, (2) #egypt, (3) #tahrir. In the conclusion for the report they deduce that over 60% of the tweets made during the protests were retweets and deemed noisy output. However on the other hand they stated that the retweet could of been a crowd powered recommendation system.

Arabic Knowledge@Wharton (AKW): What are the biggest changes in regional social media use in the last 12 months?

Fadi Salem (FS): The growth is still strong, and the shift towards political and societal uses, rather than entertainment, is still going on. It has more than doubled since the last time we published. We have forty-three million users on Facebook in the region, as of May. The same trends that we have witnessed have continued. One major new finding is language -- the majority of users across the different platforms now prefer Arabic. Arabic is now the fastest growing language across Twitter and Facebook globally. That meant effectively that it moved from elite, educated young groups using it, to a medium for the masses in the region. And that creates new challenges and opportunities as well.

Racha Mourtada (RM): Also, there was a more subtle kind of change. It was not just being used for the Arab Spring and political activism. It has turned slightly towards social activism and civic uses, for instance against sexual harassment. So [it is] not linked to the Arab Spring, but rather an offspring as well.

AKW: And what have been the biggest surprises, as far as the trends are concerned?

RM: Even though women were very active during the Arab Spring using social media and on the ground that really did not translate to growth in female users in the Arab world. Female users in the Arab World constitute one third of Facebook users, whereas on a global level, they represent fifty percent of Facebook users. There have been very slight changes in that usage.

AKW: Are there any reasons why?

FS: Our third report focused on women's empowerment. We did a regional survey, and two categories of factors played into that. The first are personal factors for women not using social media, and then there are environmental factors. The major finding then was that the cultural and societal limitations and barriers that exist for women in the region, for participation in general -- political, economic, and civic -- these cause the number of women users to be less than men. So access, education, the sense of empowerment -- all of these are factors.

AKW: What accounts for the ongoing growth of social media use, which is much higher here than other parts of the world?

FS: First, the convergence of social media and traditional media helped a lot. The fact that it is perceived by a majority of people in the region for playing a role in the transformations taking place, that invited and became an incentive for many to join these platforms, and to effectively to try to change things. One of the other major surprises we have seen this year, is that in addition to the transformation in the way people use social media, there was the evolution of a virtual civil society based on this original activist culture that was created online earlier. So now you have organized groups using social media to impact change, and becoming alternative civil society movements online. Given the fact that most of these countries do not have free media or free parliament -- that is still the case even in countries that witnessed transformation -- the influence of social media on these populations is still strong. They seek to mobilize in a more structured way. Instead of just to topple governments or protest, they aim to make an organized movement that influences change practically. Especially now that governments are listening; most of the governments are listening to social media, either out of fear or interest to learn more about what the majority of the population are doing.

AKW: There has been a divergence in how the Arab Spring has played out in the region. Has that resulted too in a regional divergence of approach and use of social media?

FS: Not necessarily, in my view. There has been a divergence in the Arab Spring, but online, the spillover effect is between all these countries. It is not confined to one geographic location. So people who are using social media in the United Arab Emirates are actually very influential in Egypt. Egyptians are influential in Tunisia, and so on. They are taking part of these movements online, effectively becoming members of it. It is like this Pan-Arabism online, but it is not an ideology. It is more of a sense of unity among the online population. Another surprising outcome from the last survey, and we have even seen this in the most recent survey we have done, that social media has an equalizing factor among men and women. They have the same reaction to issues, for instance related to women. But it is not the case offline, where they have different opinions. It is the same case even among users between different geographic locations. You would see more or less people thinking the same way across the region. You get almost the same reaction to everything you ask. People who use social media across the region have almost identical points of view towards many things. It is definitely not the case among those who do not use social media among these countries.

RM: It seems to have a homogenizing effect; it brings people to the same points of view.

AKW: Perception -- is it education, is it exposure, or is it access to technology?

RM: It is a combination of all of that. Again, when we looked at women and the reasons that stopped them from using social media, a lot of the personal factors, such as ICT education, tech savvy, or just general literacy does not factor in. So most of the people it seems who are using social media are from a certain kind of tech suaveness and educational level. That is what brings everyone to the same point of view.

FS: Additionally, the free flow of information, the awareness level increases in an expedited way. There is a snowballing effect; people change perceptions: "Everybody is thinking about it this way, let me think about that then."

RM: One of the top things we found from our research survey is that one of the more positive impacts of using social media is that people here are tolerating other people's opinions more. That actually was the highest positive impact that people listed.

FS: To clarify, the question was, 'What's the main impact of social media on your culture?' The main answer across the region was that it has made me more tolerant of other points of view.

AKW: More tolerant of criticism and cynicism? That seems to have found a large audience with Arab social media users, especially in political commentary.

FS: Yes, that is happening, and that will continue, but the reaction of the people in many cases -- in previous cases, a reaction could take a diplomatic magnitude, with countries stopping relations with other countries because of a satire. Today they are more okay with letting it go, accepting it as something that is happening without the need for major consequences; sometimes learning from it, sometimes even laughing at it. This is not everybody, but this is the majority of the respondents we have got to [answer] this specific question. So, some people are open to accepting the other points of view, others are just [not], as always. Such mediums have amplified extreme points of view also. But I think somewhere in the middle, there is a big group that's changed their critical views, and are more open to hearing criticism again and again, realizing that nothing happens if someone criticizes my country or my religion.

AKW: Do some view social media as a safety valve? There is the online video recently of a Saudi woman defying religious police at a shopping mall. While arguing with them, she says she has uploaded the video to Twitter and YouTube.

RM: That is one of the good things about social media that a lot of people have caught onto. It promotes transparency and accountability. You can pretty much post anything onto YouTube and show the world what is going on. That is what happened in the Arab Spring that brought it to the attention of so many people. So it has opened a lot of people's eyes -- that you cannot hide things anymore.

FS: In other words, the reputational damage that you can cause on Facebook, or other social media platforms, it is a factor that many people take into account in this region.

AKW: The idea of reputational damage from social media worries a lot of businesses in the region.

RM: Yes, one of the main concerns for a lot of people surveyed was reputational damage on social media, and how to manage that.

FS: We did not [study that as] this is a perception, again. But definitely, businesses and governments are working on minimizing or managing the reputational impact from social media. It is a growing business. Many are taking advantage of this, trying to provide services to manage identity, and use techniques to delete things, or keep it under a pile of information. But the major way governments are doing this is by regulation. They are regulating the use of social media by their employees and by the public. You see this in the Gulf and elsewhere in the region, where a structure for legal reaction to social media is being developed; to allow for a way to respond to something that is damaging on social media, whether the recipient is a government, a business or an ordinary person.

AKW: Is there a differentiation across the Arab world, as far as government reaction and response?

FS: In the past year it has become clear that some countries -- and this is changing in some countries over the year -- but there were clearly at the beginning of 2011 some governments whose reaction was to pull the kill switch, stop the Internet, stop social media, criminalize it, monitor it, and block it. So that was the first reaction of many countries. But the reaction by the public that was created in certain countries made many governments think again. For example, in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, people said that cutting the Internet was a positive thing, because it made them be active offline, not just online. That reaction made many governments in the region realize that blocking or cutting the Internet or access to social media is not the right way, because the cost would be higher. Since then, governments have been changing to a more subtle regulation. They monitor, they take things case by case, and they do not publicize reactions, unless it is a national security issue or a criminal issue that then goes to court. We have seen that, and I believe that will continue to be a trend, not only in the Arab world, but globally as well.

AKW: So have regional governments become more active online in the last twelve months?

RM: A lot of government officials are now online. The attitude may be: we cannot beat them, so join them. We might as well be online too, engage with citizens and deal with their problems. I am Lebanese, and we have seen a lot of ministers are now online, and they are quite quick to answer any questions or criticisms.

AKW: There is also the example of the Saudi Twitter user Mujtahidd, who challenged officials there with such information that they had to respond, even on social media.

FS: It goes back to the question of reputation and how it can be damaged online. This is a reason why so many government entities or officials want to either join or block social media. The changes started with, 'Let's block it and stop it,' that was the original way governments in the region used to manage media issues. That was not working so what is next -- join the discussions, and try to do reputational damage control, or try to influence the discussion one way or another. So Mujtahidd is a case, and it created a reaction, where the government decided they could not stop the information, so let's talk to him. It made it clear that was a policy that could work.

AKW: But in the case of Bahrain and Syria, it seems there is a third response, which is, find the people behind the social media posts, and punish them.

RM: That is another extreme. But I don't think it is ultimately going to be useful, because it attracts a lot of international attention. Also, a lot of government officials realize they cannot afford not to be on social media, and that is the right way rather than to monitor or suppress people for being online.

AKW: Perhaps Bahrain and Syria are still behind in the revolutions compared to Egypt or Tunisia.

FS: Personally, in the case of Syria and Bahrain, it is very different than Egypt or Tunisia in one major way. A majority of people within Egypt and Tunisia had a similar point of view about the governments, while in Syria and Bahrain you have a clear split in the opinions of the government. That created more discussions and low-level tensions online between the two groups that influenced all the discussions on social media, and created the Syrian Electronic Army, hacking,

counter-hacking and online mobs, and blacklists. Because there is a split in society, it explains the governments' reaction, that they have support and can utilize these measures.

One of the major findings of our research on Twitter, for example, the regional discussions on Twitter are always about what is going on with Arab Spring, where is the revolution now. Always, since we started our research, Syria and Bahrain are among the top five discussions. This last research we have done, Syria and Bahrain hash tags, in English and in Arabic, are the top two. Not because everybody in the region are talking about Syria and Bahrain -- they are, but they are also talking about Egypt, and other countries -- but because Bahrainis and Syrians, or those involved in the two conflicts, are talking a lot to each other.

AKW: Switching topics to demographics, since the growth is so dramatic, have there been changes in who is coming online in the past twelve months?

RM: They have not really changed, mainly because the Middle East is such a young region. It is mainly the youth who are driving the growth of Facebook and Twitter. They constitute seventy percent of Facebook users, and they are such a large part of the demographic in general. They really are the drivers of growth.

FS: The online population of Facebook is between the ages of fifteen and thirty. These are the majority of the users. So that did not change from last year. The gender breakdown did not change from last year. What changed is the language of the users. Which means that the users are now different. They are still seventy percent young, but they are not necessarily the elite, Western-educated or who have access to better education. It is just the normal public. It increased over Twitter and Facebook; it is an increased number of users across several countries, using Arabic rather than English, which is the opposite at the beginning of 2011.

Today we are talking about a growth inside the Arab region, in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt. Egypt has about ten million Facebook users now. That means that of the two million users that existed at the end of 2010, this is not just those young Egyptians with access to good education, but also those who can only access Facebook in Arabic.

AKW: We asked previously about the notion that Twitter and Facebook are regarded as Western, and therefore there was this element of mistrust among Arab users. Is that still the case?

FS: The trust in these platforms has been built further. Twitter launching its Arabic interface obviously helped.

AKW: Last year, the top performer was the UAE.

FS: It is still the top in terms of penetration. But that was based on population figures on the time. It still remains the top performer in that category, but the penetration rate is less. But by numbers, the top performer is Egypt, representing twenty-five percent of the Arab World's entire Facebook user base.

AKW: With the elections in Egypt, how have political parties approached social media?

FS: All political movements since last year have been quick to jump on the bandwagon and use social media, or different platforms of social media, to push their message or agenda. Whether you are

government, semi-government or opposition, you are on social media trying to influence discussions. It is the young population you are targeting, and the growth is huge. So you might as well be there as soon as you can to influence the political agenda, like in Egypt. This core group is influential, not necessarily because they do things. They might not be the ones who voted in Egypt, but they definitely influenced the vote.

RM: Even in countries without an Arab Spring effect – Kuwait. For instance, surprised us with the number of Twitter users and tweets, and I used to ask Kuwaitis why. It turns out the parliament is very active on Twitter and they make up the bulk of what is going on there, and people do interact with them. It is a very active political scene, but not in the revolutionary sense.

FS: It is safe to say this is also happening in Bahrain, not just the political movements, or the civil movements, but also the government level and the parliament.

AKW: Are government officials from different countries in the region being compared on social media?

FS: It is happening, but on the local level. On a regional level, there are few examples because of the old rivalries, but on a local level, there is a lot of that. The religious ones too, which is another trend, there are a lot of religious celebrities on Twitter, and that is influencing a lot of the discussions, especially in Saudi Arabia, and they have a huge following base in the larger Gulf too. The comparisons are what is their following, what did they do, what did they say or not say. Religious figures in the Gulf definitely have taken the spotlight in the last few months.

AKW: In this region, discussing religion is culturally the last frontier, but now the topic has been injected into this sphere where anyone can comment on it.

FS: That will increase, as social media becomes more of a tool for the masses. It is very similar to when satellite dishes came out in the Arab world more than a decade ago. First, it started with news channels targeting the elite, and then as more dishes were installed in the region, there was an explosion of religious channels and shows. It is new groups joining the discussions. There is a need for those discussions to take place in this region online, and somebody is fulfilling that need.

AKW: Has there been a change in the level of discussion about Iran since the first report?

FS: Definitely, it has been decreasing. It fluctuates, but there are many priorities that people are talking about online in the Arab region. There are several countries going through transformation, several countries going through revolutions, political processes taking place, societal changes. Yes, Iran is part of the discussion, but it is not a top topic.

AKW: What is driving traffic on different platforms?

RM: It depends on the situation or the cause. I think Twitter is good for mobilizing people for a cause. On Facebook, because there is no character limit, you can have a more sustained discussion and actual pages. We have seen examples of causes going on both, such as a campaign against sexual harassment out of Egypt called HarrassMap. Different things drive people to different platforms, but each has its own unique characteristics.

FS: There are countries with a majority of Twitter users in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain. These Gulf countries in general, these are the countries that generate the discussions. About eighty percent of Twitter interactions are taking place in six countries. Kuwait generates one-third of Tweets in the region.

AKW: Are these discussions still largely anonymous?

FS: We did not measure this, but Twitter is public, and more public figures are joining Twitter, and it is becoming more of a celebrity thing, even online. Many people are joining in their own personal capacity. However, I think that will be reversed slightly, after we have seen several accounts closed because of criminal issues or Twitter users breaking some sort of law. On Facebook, the agreement that you sign up is that you have to use your own real name, which is not always the case, especially in countries where revolutions are going on. In Syria, probably everyone has two accounts, one in their name, and one just in case.

AKW: After leaders were toppled in some countries, what kind of sentiment did you see? Was there a spike in enthusiasm?

FS: I think it matured. It is not just an impulsive thing, there are much more organized efforts. On certain issues and topics, there is a small level of change happening. In other countries, I would say there are full-fledged civil society movements that are getting hundreds of thousands of people joining for a specific cause, whether it is governmental or societal. It is very much more structured now in some countries with more people joining, but it still fluctuates on a weekly basis. The fact that governments are changing their reactions to these movements all the time -- especially if it is disruptive -- it causes these movements to find a creative way of doing it on another platform. New users are still more enthusiastic about what they can do, and this is a big portion of those who have joined social media in the last twelve months.

RM: I think the hype might have died down a little bit, but people are realizing that you can use social media to create social change, to do something about your community, that you can start an enterprise. People are realizing the potential of social media beyond the revolutionary aspect of it. A lot of people thought this would be a spike, and then people would forget about social media when the revolutions were over. But I think it has sustained interest and people are being more innovative about how they use social media.

AKW: Is it feeding a desire for social entrepreneurship?

RM: People are starting to realize, if not implement, that yes, they can use social media for social entrepreneurship, to create social change, to start their own business or create awareness in their community. There are all sorts of things with a positive impact that can come out of the use of social media.

FS: This is across the region, not one country or another, not the ones that managed to use social media to topple governments or the ones that did not. Across the region the reaction was positive to influencing societal changes, or the changes taking place in their culture.

AKW: It is ironic you talk about these 'older' users when it is a period of just twelve months. But do you see a difference between them and 'newer' adopters of social media?

FS: In Syria for example, there is a fatigue among older users, that you cannot do anything anymore online, it is risky because people have been put in jail because of their online usage. It is not just the risk, but also that it is not impactful enough, that their cause is not going anywhere. However, the newly joined are more empowered. Many of the 'older' users have stopped using Facebook.

AKW: So are you seeing a higher awareness of how to use these technologies than literally twelve months ago?

FS: Absolutely, especially among the older groups, which is surprising to me. The younger users are naturally more tech savvy. But this past year, people in the older generation -- officials, practitioners, businessmen, and academics -- are joining, and they are learning fast. Everyone is joining, and they are adapting. Many of these people never thought they would be on Facebook, because they thought it was a childish thing before 2011. And now they are pushing for more followers on Twitter.