

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONFLICT: THE CASE OF THE  
MAGHREB COUNTRIES IN NORTH AFRICA**

**BY**

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**REG NO. R52/79328/2012**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN  
INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT. INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**SEPTEMBER 2014**

**DECLARATION**

I declare that this research project is my original work submitted for the award of a degree to Master of Arts in any other University.

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This research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as University Supervisor.

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**Dr. Ibrahim Farah**

## **DEDICATION**

To my wife Rosaline and children Nkirote, Gakii and Kathambi for being supportive throughout my study. To my relatives and close friends who in one way or the other walked with me through this journey of information search. The experience acquired during my period of study at this university shall for ever be cherished.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to thank our Almighty God for the far he has brought me. His promise in the book of Jeremiah 27:11 coupled with a dedicated university faculty among them Dr. Ibrahim Farah, through their professionalism have inspired and guided me in coming up with this piece of work.

I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Farah as a person for his guidance and words of advice not forgetting my classmates whose criticism and corrections motivated and contributed to completion of this project.

Finally, may many thanks go to my family for their unconditional love and for standing with me throughout the period of my study. May God Almighty bless you all abundantly.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
DDoS	Distributed Denial of Service
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ID	Identity Card
ISHR	International Society for Human Rights
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UGC	User Generated Content
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organization

## **ABSTRACT**

Information and communication technology is a phenomenon meant to enhance and improve on the quality of human life. Nonetheless, social media has not only brought development but also other social evils such as cybercrime and cyberactivism mostly on the negative. It is with this background that this study seeks to establish the influence of social media during and after the conflict in Maghreb Countries in North Africa, analyse the influence of social media in conflict and assess state response to social media during the Arab Spring between December 2010 and end of 2012. Social media, as a source of information and entertainment; where not well managed has been used to inflict and cause pain to the very people it is meant to serve. The fact that it obeys no boundary jurisdiction, participation and contribution to any debate is usually a global affair. The study utilizes secondary data by intensively collecting, reviewing and analyzing published texts from books, internet, magazines, journals, newspaper articles, periodicals and any other reliable information to ascertain the role social media played during the height of conflict in the Maghreb countries in North Africa. Through the use of social sites such as twitter, facebook, SMSs among others and disseminating the same as a user generated content (UGC), citizen journalism has been a source of information, part of which is biased and extremely inciting leading to conflict. The study established that the borderless social media is a very critical tool to organize and mobilize movements and protests even from the Diaspora more especially because it is real time. Social media was very key in providing leadership and managerial infrastructure during the crisis besides creating awareness of the happenings both locally and internationally.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.0 Introduction

Social Media is a collection of Internet-based applications that build on the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0. This web allows the development and exchange of user-generated content (UGC). In June 2010, 22 percent of time spent online worldwide was spent in blog sites and social media. The global average time spent per person on social media sites is now nearly five and a half hours per month. Popular social media include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and Tumblr.<sup>1</sup>

Facebook is a social site that was launched in the month of February in the year 2004. By January 2011, facebook had more than 600 million active users. According to Hall, Facebook is a social service that enables people commune with family members, friends and coworkers more efficiently.<sup>2</sup> It is a share of the lives of millions of people's as they post or respond to comments on daily basis. On the other hand, Twitter is considered as a real-time network that connects an individual to the latest information about what they find interesting. Twitter permits users to send out messages in short spurts with a maximum of 140 characters per "tweet." In this site, users can "follow" communicate by looking for hashtags like #egypt or follow other users. By September 2010, Twitter had about 175 million registered users and an average of 95 million tweets per day.

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<sup>1</sup> Grannam, J. *Social Media in the Arab World: Leading to the Uprising*, (Washington DC, Centre for International Media Assistance, 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Hall, Emma. Year after Arab Spring, digital, social media shape region's rebirth. *Advertising Age*, vol. 83, no. 24 (June 11, 2012): 10

Gardner posits that YouTube was founded in 2005.<sup>3</sup> It is the leader, when it comes to online video, and a primary destination to watch and share original videos globally by use of a Web experience. In addition, YouTube permits individuals to share and upload video clips easily on www.YouTube.com and across the Internet via mobile devices, blogs, websites as well as email. YouTube has changed the way people share videos as it has created a simple way to share large and cumbersome video files. Before the development of YouTube, it was complicated to share video with many people. On the other hand, Flickr is a photo-sharing site that permits users to distribute photos on www.flickr.com or via embedded apps on other websites. Flickr permits users to label photos with keywords, which brings together communities around common events or interests.

The recent uprisings and protests in different Maghreb Countries have both been referred “Facebook revolutions” and “Twitter revolutions” as a result of the widespread use of user-generated content distributed over social networks sites such as Twitter and Facebook by activists, protesters and protests supporters, as well as by individuals following the occurrences around the world. User-generated content (UGC) is defined as internet content (images, text, sound clips and videos) created and uploaded to the internet by users typically for no definite financial gain, but rather for passion or enjoyment. UGC is usually developed by amateurs, rather than professionals. UGC includes video clips, audio clips (podcasts), blogs and comments on internet forums on social networks such as Twitter or Facebook.<sup>4</sup>

UGC played a significant role in the Maghreb Countries uprisings and protests. And UGC developed in mobile phones was specifically important as it permitted those witnessing or

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<sup>3</sup> Gardner, Lloyd. *The Road to Tahrir Square*. (New York, The New Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Pace, Michelle. An Arab ‘Spring’ of a Different Kind? Resilience and Freedom in the Case of an Occupied Nation. *Mediterranean Politics* 18, no. 1 (March, 2013): 42-59.

involved in the protests to upload content in the time of the protests and report on live events. Mobile phones were also used by protesters to communicate with protestors and spread their message. Social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter were the principal online tools that individuals around the globe use to distribute this content.

UGC and social networking websites have been used and continue to be used in protests in other countries throughout the Maghreb Countries. This paper investigates the role of social media in conflict by focusing on the Maghreb Countries in the North of Africa.

## **1.1 Background**

The social media has of late become significant resource in collective action mobilization and the consequent social movements creation, organization, and implementation globally. Social media development has created Web-fueled social movements opportunities, or cyberactivism, to modify the collective action landscape. Cyberactivism is a developing field of scholarly investigation, even though it is still not well understood, and it largely lacks a clear consistent and cohesive direction.

Langman argues that computer-savvy activists make use of the Internet to start and plan a broad dissention activities spectrum, which includes public protests, consumer boycotts as well as demonstrations.<sup>5</sup> In addition, new communication technologies especially social media such as social-networking sites, short messaging services (SMS), and blogs are collectively, a considerable new resource for social movements successful planning and implementation. Technologies related to social media have been used particularly in planning and implementing collective activities, promoting a feeling of community and collective identity amongst group

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<sup>5</sup> Langman, L. From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of interworked social movements. *Sociological Theory*, 23, no. 1 (April, 2005), 42–74.

members that are marginalized. In addition, they create less-confined political spaces, establish links with other social movements, and publicize causes to obtain support from other communities worldwide.

Renowned cyberactivism movements comprise of anti-globalization, global justice movements as well as antiwar movements. In the antiwar movement in Iraq, the use of the Internet by activists to convey their messages, organize, and create awareness amongst decentralized networks led to global protests that assembled approximately 10 million activists who were involved in demonstrations in hundreds of cities globally on February 15, 2003.<sup>6</sup> The World Trade Organization (WTO) protest in the year 1999 in Seattle marked the start of the global justice cyber movement, and new communication technologies like social media became channels for assembling protestors in tens of thousands who confronted WTO delegates.<sup>7</sup> The Internet has also facilitated the creation of various democratic movements and groups like the World Social Forum. The World Social Forum mobilized global justice movements of more than 100,000 activists in Brazil in the year 2003 and in Mumbai in the year 2004.<sup>8</sup>

Besides supporting social and political movements in more conventional ways through the provision of political expression opportunities, collective actors symbolic identification, and information exchange, the social media may serve a unique instrumental function. In their study to examine the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in the year 2001 and the European Social Forum in Florence in the year 2002, Della Porta and Mosca established that Internet-based communication

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<sup>6</sup> Cortright, D. (2007). The movement against war in Iraq. *Nonviolent Social Change: The Bulletin of the Manchester College Peace Studies Institute*.  
[http://www.manchester.edu/academics/departments/peace\\_studies/bulletin/2007/documents/The%20Movement%20against%20War%20in%20Iraq.pdf](http://www.manchester.edu/academics/departments/peace_studies/bulletin/2007/documents/The%20Movement%20against%20War%20in%20Iraq.pdf) Accessed 8 May 2014

<sup>7</sup> Juris, J. *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization*. (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2008)

<sup>8</sup> Langman, L. From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of interworked social movements. *Sociological Theory*, 23 no. 1 (April, 2005), 42–74.

technologies offer a significant additional resource for social movements implemented by “resource poor” actors, providing a mass communication means that may have previously been restricted by temporal, financial or spatial constraints.<sup>9</sup>

The use of social networking websites, mobile phones as well as UGC in protests in the Maghreb Countries in North Africa was not entirely unprecedented. Social sites like Twitter have been used in the past in protests in Moldova and Iran in the year 2009 and these two protests were also referred to as Twitter revolutions. In the year 2001, the ousting of the Philippines President, Joseph Estrada, has been considered to be an “SMS revolution” as a result of its widespread use of text messages which mobilized protesters to demand and congregate during the Estrada's removal. These occurrences were described at the time by a programme officer at the United Nations University as “arguably the world's first 'e-revolution' - a change of government that resulted from new ICT forms.

Local development and distribution of content on the ground in the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, blended with the ultimate effect and size of the protests involved, which perhaps had not been evidenced on such a large scale. Information and communication technologies like mobile phones played and are still playing a considerable role in human rights and democratic struggles in Maghreb Countries in North Africa; although many think and feel that the ICTs role should not be overstated. The new communication technologies like Facebook and Twitter were not the only causes of uprising and protests in Egypt and Tunisia, or indeed in any other Maghreb Country.<sup>10</sup> Protests causes involve a mixture of non-technological factors that include

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<sup>9</sup> Della Porta, D., & Mosca, L. Global-net for global movements? A network of networks for a movement of movements. *Journal of Public Policy*, 25, no. 1, (May, 2005), 165–190.

<sup>10</sup> Siddique, H., Owen, P., & Gabbatt, A. Protests in Egypt and unrest in the Middle East—As it happened. 2011, January 25 *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/blog/2011/jan/25/middleeast-tunisia>. Accessed 8 May 2014

decades of repression, economic and political marginalization, the long-term structural decay of the state institutions legitimacy and effectiveness, and the soaring of the prices of food. This was combined with a long-felt desire amongst the general population for their rights recognition and political representation. On the streets, various factors like grass-roots organizing, popular sentiments as well as the state security apparatuses allegiance and strength essentially determined the protests outcomes.

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

Dominick states that beyond having a considerable function of promoting socioeconomic and political arenas; social media has rapidly become the main spring of information of the occurrences all over the world.<sup>11</sup> Coupled with the skill of being immediate, social media has an enormous impact in the approach of the society's actions and relations. Normally, media is anticipated to be precise and unbiased by being objective in data collection and coverage so that the consumer could make appropriate resolutions.<sup>12</sup> Designed or undersigned media scope of cruel occurrences and broadcasting the same to the people has frequently led to mistrust and hatred or even an urge to take revenge. Expertise in media coverage is therefore very essential since partial stories particularly those that are sympathetic to some parties against others in any dispute could instead fuel the quarrel further, more especially because social media is rarely controlled, anything spotted by the user is spread.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dominick, J.R, *The Dynamics of Mass Communication: Media in the Digital Age*, (New York, McGraw, 2005) pg 32

<sup>12</sup> Dominick, J. R. *The Dynamics of Mass Communication: Media in the Digital Age*. (New York, McGraw, 2005)

<sup>13</sup> Kan, Charlotte. Arab governments and the Social Media revolution. *Middle East* no. 437 (November 2012): 18.

It is necessary to note that currently before an argument happens, media is being employed for what has been nicknamed “media violence” where all manner of misinformation, disinformation and emotional conflict go before the real physical fighting. A good case in point is the social media effect in North Africa that ended up with the removal from power of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt regimes. In mass media, differing parties connect with each other posting harmful information in opposition to their rivals like it happened when CNN gave information that Iraq had dangerous weapons resulting to the collapse of Sadaam Hussein regime during the 2<sup>nd</sup> gulf war. In nations such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, media was very influential to the individual distress that happened at the time of conflict.

While categorization and precise figures of deaths vary, it is clear that developing nations have been nearly like a permanent host to the most horrible quarrels happening nowadays, considering that these quarrels are devastatingly domestic. From 1990, an enormous 90% of international quarrels associated bereavements have been civilians and 80% of them have been females and children.<sup>14</sup> Whereas civil conflicts rise and civilians turn out to be its major victims, a part of the media has been in the front position igniting these conflicts.

It is in this respect that this research seeks to conduct a study to find out to what degree has social media affected and influenced conflicts. My study will concentrate on this particularly with regard to the revolution in Maghreb states of North Africa particularly in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt from end December 2010 to 2012.

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<sup>14</sup> Woodhouse, T. et al, *The Prevention, Management and Transportation of Deadly Conflicts* in Contemporary Conflict Resolution (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2007), p159-184

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The overall objective of the study is to examine the influence of social media on conflict in the Maghreb countries in North Africa. More especially the study aims to:

- i. Provide an overview of the influence of social media on conflict;
- ii. Analyze the influence of social media on conflict in the Maghreb countries;
- iii. Assess state response to social media in the Arab Spring.

### **1.4 Literature Review**

This section collates and analyses the concept of the role of social media in conflict as discussed by various scholars and critically analyzing it with a view to bringing out its effects in conflict situations.

#### **1.4.1 Internet Freedom in the Maghreb Countries**

Towards the end of year-2005, the RSF (Reporters without Borders) released a list of fifteen “internet enemies”, with four of them from the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA); Saudi-Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and Libya. Five years later, RSF released a list of twelve internet enemies, among them Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and Egypt. In early 2011, only Syria and Saudi Arabia were stated as “internet enemies”, though Bahrain, Libya, Tunisia, Belarus, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt were said to be “under scrutiny”.<sup>15</sup> By the year-2011, RSF listed Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia as having imprisoned their citizens. The filtering of internet is widespread in the MENA area, and software built up in the West is applied in developing and controlling these filters. According to Open Net Initiative, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman,

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<sup>15</sup> Kamel, Sherif H. Egypt's Ongoing Uprising and the Role of Social Media: Is there Development?." *Information Technology For Development* 20, no. 1 (January 2014): 78-91.

Saudi Arabia, Sudan, UAE, Kuwait, Tunisia and Yemen apply Western technologies to block internet data, for instance websites that give skeptical outlooks of Islam, sex, dating services, atheist discourse and proxy and obscurity instruments. Limitations on the internet autonomy also take place in internet cafés. A good example is Tunisia where the law expects the internet cafés to observe people's access and to record their ID card numbers.<sup>16</sup>

According to a research done by Arab media in 2007, “the effect of restriction across the area is mixed,” regardless of the constant restriction, governments have not managed to silence opposition on the internet or stop activists from growing their utilization of the technology and to be in touch and organize themselves.<sup>17</sup>

#### **1.4.2 Social Media and Conflict**

At the end of 2010, in Tunisia's small township of Sidi Bouzid, an extremely poor grocery trader Mohammed Bouazizi; set himself ablaze in a community square at a local government bureau. In his efforts to sell vegetables so as to take care of his single mother and siblings, Bouazizi, was constantly harassed by the area law enforcers, who frequently demanded licenses and bribes resulting to seizure of his stock. His final encounter with the police force is when they destroyed his stock and tools of work and also beat him up. After failing in his endeavors to have a meeting with the area government officer to discuss his harassment, he soaked his body with oil and set himself ablaze and died while undergoing treatment in hospital.<sup>18</sup>

His death resulted to demonstrations in Sidi Bouzid town and almost the entire MENA area. Nevertheless, international TV and print media delayed in broadcasting the news while state

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<sup>16</sup> Goytisoló, Juan. Liberation Square. *Massachusetts Review* 52, no. 3/4 (Winter, 2011): 380

<sup>17</sup> Hofheinz, A. Arab Internet Use: Popular Trends and Public Impact, in Sklar, N. (ed) *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy and Public Life*, (New York, IB Tauris, 2007)p. 6

<sup>18</sup> Motadel, David. Waves of Revolution. *History Today* 61, no. 4 (April, 2011): 3-4.

media within MENA either shunned reporting, or reported incorrectly. Large volumes of internet sites such as YouTube were restricted by the internet filter in Tunisia. Facebook, which survived restriction at the time, ended up being a significant arena for disseminating the information about the death of Bouazizi and the uprising in Sidi Bouzid. Twitter, even if it is rarely used in Tunisia, was also active in spreading the news of the uprising.<sup>19</sup>

Around the world, numerous individuals and groups who had interest in the unfolding events consulted Facebook and Twitter for the news. Information in Twitter about Tunisia's happenings motivated people around MENA area; for instance Gigi Ibrahim an activist from Egypt, who after seeing the collapse of the Tunisia's President, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali empire, tweeted "The Tunisian revolt is being twitterised, an account is being written down by the people #sidibouzid #Tunisia."

Social networking podiums in Egypt such as Twitter and Facebook were utilized in announcing and broadcasting the earlier demonstrations of early 2011. Facebook groupings like "We are all Khaled Said" and the "Youth Movement of April 6<sup>th</sup>" initiated protests on January, 25th. The strategies and communication of the demonstrations were also spread through usual approaches such as verbal communications; printed brochures and email of a file informing of the strategies for the demonstrations.

Facebook was also utilized in publicizing demonstrations in various other states in the MENA region, where it is clear that almost every plan to demonstrate at the beginning of 2011 was upheld by several categories of Facebook page, occasion or grouping. UGC was utilized to discuss the demonstrations within the borders and even internationally, and to give live coverage,

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<sup>19</sup> Vallance, Karla. The power of social media. *Christian Science Monitor*, July 05, 2011., N.PAG

information and views. News was frequently circulated on Twitter, where the protesters regularly had their personal hash tags. The hash tags #Jan25, #Jan30, #Feb14, #Feb17 #Mar11/#ksa, #Kuwait, #SidiBouزيد, #Yemen/#Yamen and #Syria were used to imply the protests in Egypt, Sudan, Bahrain, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Tunisia and Syria respectively.<sup>20</sup>

UGC assisted in firstly directing the world's attention to the revolt in Egypt and Tunisia, and afterwards to other nations, thereby overshadowing government censoring. UGC acted as a channel for the dissemination of news around and revealing issues not broadcasted by or that was beyond the reach of the traditional media. Micro-blogging, and photo and film sharing through mobile phones became channels to broadcast and also use information about the demonstrations. The phones UGC nexus offered a significant instrument for protesters to notify the external world of their expectations, the issues surrounding the genuine demonstrations and the police, armed forces and community's responses temperament. UGC frequently gave opinions and perceptions that state-run and private media did not give, including photos that no media was there to witness. In areas where admittance by global journalists has been nearly totally limited, such as Syria, films on mobile phone became practically the single mode to report on demonstrations. All over MENA, avenues like Facebook and Twitter, and image and film sharing podiums characterized chances to stream the legitimacy to power.<sup>21</sup>

### **1.4.3 Online Communication**

Online communication is two-way contrary to the one-way TV, radio and newspapers. This is because internet users respond to communication in considerable minimal time limit as opposed to receiving only. Nevertheless, much like hearing and viewing of a story from TV, the viewers

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<sup>20</sup> Morozov, Evgeny, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, (New York, Public Affairs, 2011)

<sup>21</sup> Nunns, Alex and Idle, Nadia *Tweets from Tahrir* (New York, OR Books, 2011).

of that news are not automatically prone for reaction. Still, those who practically get link to a group may act further. As an alternative to being present in conferences, workshops and meetings, indifferent persons can join a Facebook grouping or pursue a Twitter feeds which offer them various strategies of ambiguity but do not essentially inspire them to actually get to the streets and stimulate an uprising” from the homes.<sup>22</sup>

There are various obvious advantages of online communication for societal change. Online groups are cheap for teaching, hiring and management than conventional approaches. Most individuals are by now making use of the social media podiums that protesters can utilize for communication, thus, it is not necessary to influence employees to get or link to a different site, or in the case of conventional media, view or subscribe to a fresh curriculum or journal. Furthermore, most individuals logically form groups based on shared foundations or interests, thus getting spectators is simple online.

Studies clearly indicate that individuals who are vigorous online have high possibilities of being vigorous in group activities. In accordance to Pew Research Center, over 80% of those who visit Internet take part in groups as opposed to 56% of those who do not visit Internet. Over 82% of those who visit social media are active in groups whereas 85% of those active in Twitter are also active in groups. Moreover, if users think that they can really create a difference, they have high probability to participate in a group.<sup>23</sup>

Protesters who make use of social media for community change can utilize them to plan in-actual-life and in-virtual-life conventions, keep supporters aware of proceedings and news, and increase supporters. Social media use can increase followers’ self-efficiency to connect to a

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<sup>22</sup> Sreberny A, Khiabany G. *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran* (London, IB Tauris, 2010)

<sup>23</sup> Shirky, C. The political Power of Social Media. *Foreign Aff airs*, 90 no. 1 (May, 2011): 28-41.

cause since, partially because their peers' participation and actions are apparent. Furthermore, it can be helpful by providing an on-the-ground outlook to individuals not ethnically or physically near the users.<sup>24</sup>

#### **1.4.4 Motivations for Political Action**

Despite of the types of instruments employed in the communication and managing it, social transformation needs much work. Even a well-controlled revolution must encounter an activist procedure of social change which involves information acquirement, information growth, distribution and sharing, ideation and notion control, sympathy and emotional link and the dissemination of reliable ideas that motivate cognitive conflict".<sup>25</sup>

A significant factor of inspiring social transformation is persuading people that their involvement will create a difference, particularly if their involvement will need them to encounter individual distress or risk. The task behind social transformation in itself a big assignment is nowadays frequently linked to the gadgets individuals apply to communicate, rather than the individuals behind the task. It is worth noting that despite the instruments applied in preparation and organization, from verbal communication to radio and online, similar fundamental codes of inspiration must be utilized. Social media may cause the work of disseminating information effortless, but the duty of persuading people to take individual risks is not minimized.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Morozov E. *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World*. (London, Allen Lane, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Cambanis, Thanassis. "Weekend: Now what? They Came Together to Topple Mubarak, but can Egypt's Revolutionaries Agree on what Comes Next?." *The Guardian*: 26. *ProQuest*. Aug 13 2011. Web. 22 Feb. 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Ritter and Alexander Trechsel, "Revolutionary Cells: On the Role of Texts, Tweets, and Status Updates in Nonviolent Revolutions" (paper presented at conference on "Internet, Voting and Democracy," Laguna Beach, CA, May 14–15, 2011), 3

### **1.4.5 State Responses**

The ISHR (International Society for Human Rights) campaign through internet has shown challenged present leaders terrorized by fear of the innovative odds of ICTs. For instance, in Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, the likes of former leader of Libya Muammar Gaddafi and Kim Jong II of N. Korea, are depicted in grand abodes, recoiling in close to paralytic terror of a computer mouse, leaping on furniture, dangling from chandeliers and curtains, in their efforts to flee. Nevertheless, the ISHR operation does not perfectly reveal the actual power balance in the electronic environment, which is not essentially for the mouse. The actual power balance could have been well signified if balanced with other images, boots compressing mice, keyboards and cell phones once they are branded as threats for disseminating information deemed as threatening to the system. Also, the system's technicians can disconnect the mice, hence ending the capacity of activists to converse.

UGC can be a great instrument in social engagements promoting democracy and rights of the people. Nevertheless, the avenues through which this information flows have ended up being contentious areas between those pro democracy and those supporting incumbent groups, not essentially balanced in support of those creating information in favor of the protests. The subsequent segment examines how governments in the MENA area hindered rebels during the demonstrations by hampering the movement of information and also by using UGC to follow on the demonstrators and apprehending, detaining and harassing them. Regimes could seize the opportunity of superior internet filters to obstruct information during the revolutions. For example, in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, there were attacks on internet through internet shutdowns,

derailments and filtering. Furthermore, there were apprehensions, detentions and harassment of people participating in the formation and broadcasting of UGC.<sup>27</sup>

UGC played a significant role in the MENA Countries uprisings and protests. UGC developed in mobile phones was specifically important as it permitted those witnessing or involved in the protests to upload content in the time of the protests and report on live events. Mobile phones were also used by protesters to communicate with protestors and spread their message. Social network sites such as Twitter and Facebook were the principal online tools that individuals around the globe use to distribute this content.

The saying that the revolution will be tweeted or streamed or live-blogged have come true with specific cases being Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Bahrain where most people took to the streets with their mobile phones to spread their messages and to organize the demonstrations. The creation of UGC in the course of the protests played a vital role in the MENA area although not necessarily a big one. Internet freedom in the MENA region will be the starting point for investigating the usage of UGC in the Arab spring.<sup>28</sup>

Initially, UGC helped to direct global attention towards the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. This also influenced democratic struggles of the entire region.

Despite Facebook and Twitter boasting of being secure to users especially as protest tools, they could also bring users susceptibility to state scrutiny. Some of the programs in the applications were employed by security and intelligence departments to monitor and locate protesters.

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<sup>27</sup> Charlie Beckett, *After Tunisia and Egypt: Towards a New Typology of Media and Networked Political Change*, *Polis*, 2011, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/02/11/after-tunisia-and-egypt-towards-a-new-typology-of-media-and-networked-political-change/> Accessed 8 May 2014

<sup>28</sup> Hofheinz, A. *Arab Internet Use: Popular Trends and Public Impact*, in Sklar, N. (ed) *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy and Public Life*, (New York, IB Tauris, 2007)p. 6

In Sudan, Facebook publicized demonstrations against the government and President El-Bashir, the country zealously and vigorously scrutinized social association websites. When demonstrations were just about to occur, more often than not, protesters found police ready to face them and were swiftly arrested. Other reports indicated that individuals on Facebook were really government departments or followers of the government, disseminating half truths on these groups and acting as detectives to other Facebook members.<sup>29</sup>

In Azerbaijan for example, though not within the MENA region but affected by occurrences in Egypt, numerous Facebook groups supported demonstrations at the beginning of 2011. At the same period, Jabbar, a 20 year old protester and a member of the opposition Popular Front, was apprehended and charged with ownership of narcotics but his followers and lawyer, maintained that he was arrested following the information he had written on Facebook advocating for peaceful demonstrations in Egypt. The Amnesty International termed the charges an excuse to tame Jabbar for his political protest and to deter other young protesters from actualizing their liberty of expression. Several other arrests of individuals who had contributed on Facebook groups took place.<sup>30</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, demonstrations against the government and the monarchy system, planned for March 2011, were initiated on Twitter and Facebook. Facebook protesters were also speedily apprehended and the government made announcements concerning the risks of protest. The technique adopted by the Tunisian government was highly technological and involved stealing of Twitter and Facebook passwords and user-names as well as those of e-mail accounts on internet

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<sup>29</sup> Ronald J. Deibert, John Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski, and Jonathan Zittrain, eds., *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA,: MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Miryam Aouragh and Anne Alexander, "The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1344–1358.

like Yahoo and Gmail. This was realized by the addition of phishing writings into these pages prior to the final-user receiving them.<sup>31</sup>

The Mubarak government verified its critical authority over online communication by practically closing all Egyptian online admission. Also, in Libya, the internet was shut down from the onset of demonstrations and persistence shut downs or power black outs at the period of writing.

Sometime after the online communication had resumed, Egyptian police apprehended bloggers, Twitter and Facebook followers who had disseminated information or exposed the government in bad light. For example Wael Ghonim, Google MENA marketing head, was held in custody for one week. Following these occurrences, a well-liked outlook on Tahrir Square showed in UGC was that most demonstrators were to remain in the square till either their defeat or apprehension or until Mubarak resigned. To a majority, this was not only from assurance, but also since they were information generators themselves or had formed tracks on social networks.<sup>32</sup>

However, majority feared that owing to the apprehensions and harassments of information generators, they turned out to be victims and anticipated apprehension in case they went back home. The attacks on ICT did not automatically suppress revolutions but instead stirred them up. It also indicated the magnitude of risk and susceptibility that protesters exposed themselves to in the internet.

## **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

The theory of resource mobilization basically developed from researches of joint effort in the 1960s, realized growing eminence through the 1970s and 1980s, even if its reputation has

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Wilson and Alexandra Dunn, Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Datasets, *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1248–72.

<sup>32</sup> Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

declined now. This theory has been damned for its supposition of the reliability of dissatisfaction and joint interests through the time, its overemphasize of the importance of external resources, and its failure to sufficiently tackle societal movements that start with moderately considerable resources or those initiated by various marginal groups. Regardless of these assertions and the varying setting of societal movements from the theory's glory days, resource mobilization ought not to be economical, since it still has a lot to offer.<sup>33</sup> Various researchers have recommended amendments of the theory, and the growing utilization of social media technologies in societal movements offers a chance to reconsider the usefulness of resource mobilization in a modern perspective.

The theory is founded on the impression that resources like time, funds, managerial skills, and some social or political opportunities are vital to the triumph of social movements. At its initiation, the theory of resource mobilization was different from previous theories of joint action in its management of social movements as standard, coherent, institutionally entrenched actions that are planned and patterned, therefore enabling a study on the basis of managerial dynamics.<sup>34</sup> Though categories of resources differ among societal movements, the accessibility of appropriate resources, and of actors' skills to utilize them efficiently, are vital. Different from emotional variables reflected on by other theories of societal movement, the theory of resource mobilization was the first to identify the significance of influences not within the societal movement under

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<sup>33</sup> Opp, K.. Adverse living conditions, grievances, and political protest after Communism: The example of East Germany. *Social Forces*, 73, no. 1, (June, 2000): 29–65.

<sup>34</sup> Buechler, S. M. Beyond resource mobilization? Emerging trends in social movement theory. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34, no. 2 (July, 2002): 217–235.

research.<sup>35</sup> A detailed account of the history and growth of the theory of resource mobilization is past the scope of this document although it is possible to find it in Jenkins<sup>36</sup>.

The theory of resource mobilization indicates that both the resources accessibility and the efficiency of the actors in applying them efficiently are crucial. Additionally, to resources such as an inspired public and the accessibility of transport to collect much, an important resource for the uprising in Egypt that was used efficiently was social media. Whereas somebody cannot dispute that this was an Internet uprising, technologies of social media characterizes an essential helpful resource that lead to the commencement and survival of the demonstrations of January 25. A considerable number of Egyptians have access to social media as a result of the government's endeavors to enlarge the country's information technology capacities as an instrument for socioeconomic growth. In early 1999, government plans were free Internet admission, cheap computers and the development of Internet admission center.<sup>37</sup>

In line with the Internet World Stats, an internet marketing study firm, at the beginning of 2010, over 21% of the 80M population in Egypt could visit Internet and over 4.5M accessed Facebook. Moreover, over 70% of the people had a cell phone subscription. At the begging of 2000, numerous bloggers in Egypt were famous for handling difficult issues. The original blogs were only available in English, but the advancement of Arabic software lead to the formation of extra Arabic blogs, hence drawing a broader local audience.<sup>38</sup> As the blogosphere in Egypt developed, protesters started using other communication avenues, such as social media like Twitter, Flickr

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<sup>35</sup> Johnson, A. G. *The Blackwell dictionary of sociology*. (Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Jenkins, J. C. Resource mobilization theory and the study of social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9 (December, 2003): 527–553.

<sup>37</sup> Amin, Ramtin. The Empire Strikes Back: Social Media Uprisings and the Future of Cyber Activism. *Kennedy School Review* 10.15350215 (2009): 64-6. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 Feb. 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Hamdy, N. Arab citizen journalism in action: Challenging mainstream media, authorities and media laws. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 6, no. 1 (2009), 92–112.

and Facebook. By April 2008, Egypt initiated its initial cyber protest endeavor, in which protesters formed a Facebook account to connect to Mahalla textile personnel on a universal strike. Though Facebook account had over 70,000 followers, the strike was severely subjugated by the police. The experience and information attained in these previous social media attempts, appeared helpful in the 2011 demonstrations and successive uprising.<sup>39</sup>

Among the dialogues, the demonstrators in Tunisia informed their equals in Egypt to demonstrate at night for security reasons, to evade suicide actions, to utilize media to transmit their issues for external pressure, to spray police vehicles windscreen with black paint and to clean their eyes with Coke soda to minimize the effect of tear gas.

The demonstrators in Egypt also made use of social media to raise alarm when under threat and to promptly communicate to the protesters and the world of the happenings. *The Guardian* quotes tweets by an Egyptian reporter Abdelfattah, who on January 25, 2011, wrote a sequence of alarming tweets within a very short span at the time of demonstrators.<sup>40</sup>

What is possibly most important about the utilization of social media in the Egyptian uprising is how it altered the social mobilization dynamics. Social media initiated momentum and interactivity that were not in the conventional mobilization approaches, which normally include the utilization of flyers, bills and faxes. For example, social media allowed local and worldwide protesters from Egypt to follow the happenings in their country and uniting with social-networkers and participating in discussions.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hulaimi, Wan A. It's a Social Media Revolution in the Mid East. *New Straits Times*: 21. *ProQuest*. Feb 27 2011. Web. 22 Feb. 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Siddique, H., Owen, P., & Gabbatt, A. Protests in Egypt and unrest in the Middle East—As it happened. 2011, January 25. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/blog/2011/jan/25/middleeast-tunisia>. Accessed 8 May 2014

<sup>41</sup> Cottle, Simon. Media and the Arab Uprisings of 2011: Research Notes. *Journalism* 12.5 (2011): 647-659.

There were few individual protesters with adequate information of social media resources who assisted in enhancing the uprising. These protesters nevertheless formed Facebook pages, individual blogs and Twitter hurdles to connect followers to discussions on present situations in Egypt. In 2010, the Facebook association “We are all Khalid Said” was established after the death of a youth named Khalid. Though the association primarily was meant to disseminate news on Said’s death, it slowly developed to comprise of political debates and started attracting mostly young political protesters. The followers of the association used it to distribute information on the most preceding oppression of the Mubarak government, a debate that seemed to have resounded among aggravated Egyptians as shown by the account’s fame.

Mohamed El Baradei was among the main characters who embraced the Internet to converse with his supporters and broadcast information. As counterparts to El Baradei’s individual Facebook account and Twitter hurdle, the State Association for Change and other similar groups established Facebook accounts in support of El Baradei. Toward the end of 2010, El Baradei was cited in a newspaper from Australia stating that change would be unavoidable in Egypt and that its timing is dependent to the moment people will overcome the fear that the government has instilled in them.<sup>42</sup>

Omar Afifi, a former Egyptian police officer is another person who participated in the uprising through social media technologies. In 2008, he authored a book informing the people on how to evade police cruelty. The book was banned and his life threatened thereby compelling him to seek refuge in the U.S. He then greatly utilized social media technologies in his constant endeavor to inform Egyptians, especially via YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. During the time of Tunisian uprising, Afifi posted a sequence of comprehensive YouTube films training

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<sup>42</sup> Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

Egyptians on the modalities of staging their own uprising. He provided facts including setting the uprising date, where activists should meet, and what they should put on. Most significantly, his instructional films stressed the issue of nonviolent demonstrations.<sup>43</sup> The Associated Press cited an analyst from Middle East stating that Afifi essentially initiated the Egyptian uprising when he posted the initial film following the uprising of January 1 in Tunisia.

## **1.6 Hypotheses**

The study tested the following hypotheses:-

- i. Social media is responsible for the development of conflict in the Maghreb Countries in North Africa;
- ii. Accessibility to internet provides motivation for public action;
- iii. State oppression can lead to social uprising.

## **1.7 Justification of the Study**

This is one of the early researches that seek to study the role of social media in conflict in the Maghreb Countries in North Africa. This research project will study how social networking websites turns from being a socializing network to becoming not only the central point for political organizations and mobilization, but also acts as “political actors” that are trying to reach outcomes by themselves. The paper also assesses the usage of social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in the revolutions. This study will therefore provide information that can be used by policy makers and governments in the Maghreb Countries in North Africa as well as other parts of the world, to formulate policies on the usage and monitoring of social media.

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<sup>43</sup> Afifi, O. January 14 Tunisian Freedom Day & our date is January 25 2011. [YouTube video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdJQRz0BtU8&feature=related> Accessed 8 May 2014

To academicians and researchers, the study will provide valuable contributions from a theoretical standpoint in relation to the role of social media in conflict and conflict management. Further, the study will provide a base upon which more studies can be conducted on the role of social media in conflict and conflict resolution.

## **1.8 Research Methodology**

The research made use of secondary data. In its data collection, the research engaged in a desk review by collecting and critically analyzing published literature from books, periodicals, journals, newspaper articles, magazines, the internet and any other reliable and credible sources such as Jstor.

The research utilized descriptive survey design alongside case study research design.<sup>44</sup> The researcher collected, and critically analyzed data comparing and interpreting it on structural conflict and resource mobilization framework. The case study assessed the Arab uprising and the role of media in conflict in the MENA region. Information collected helped in establishing the reality of the resource mobilization theory by bringing out the effects of failing to distribute available resources equitably in the realm of social, economic and political spheres in the MENA region.

The study took both quantitative and qualitative approaches in analyzing the data. Though data was collected from written literature, verbal explanations from ICT experts on various issues provided the qualitative aspect of the research. From each thematic area, key issues and interpretations were highlighted coming up with the findings that are hereby presented. It is

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<sup>44</sup> Mugenda, O. & Mugenda, A. Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches, 1999, Acts Press, Nairobi.

however to note that was not easy as the topic is relatively new considering that the uprising took place a year ago and still continues.

## **1.9 Chapter Outline**

Chapter one presents an introduction to the study. It begins with background information, followed by statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, justification of the research study, literature review, theoretical framework, hypothesis, methodology and operationalization of the key terms. Chapter two will discuss the dependent variable which is conflict. On the other hand, chapter three will discuss the case study states, which include Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Chapter four will involve a critical analysis of the role of social media in conflict. Lastly, chapter five will present a conclusion of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONFLICT: AN OVERVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The uprising in Arab in the MENA region and specifically in North Africa exemplify a revolutionary wave of protests and demonstrations that swept almost the entire Arab world. These Uprisings were triggered by a protest that first protests that took place in Tunisia on December 18, 2010 following Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation protesting against police ill-treatment and corruption.<sup>45</sup> In one year, this wave sparked major spiral changes; revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia that led to the downfall of two regimes; civil uprisings in Syria and Yemen; a civil war in Libya resulting in the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime; major protests in Oman, Morocco, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Algeria and Bahrain, minor protests in Kuwait, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>46</sup> In these Arab countries, the protests took the form of persistent campaigns that involved many ordinary citizens using similar techniques of civil resistance; marches, strikes, demonstrations and rallies. Predominantly, central to the protest process as well has been the application of social media to communicate; raise awareness, organize and issue danger alerts amongst the hundreds of protestors in the face of state efforts at internet censorship, repression, crowd control, and to some extent physical attack to the degree of protestors being beaten or shot in cold blood.

Most of the demonstrations in the North Africa have met vicious reactions from authorities and from pro-government counter-demonstrators and militias. The main slogan of the protesters in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Cottle, Simon. Media and the Arab Uprisings of 2011: Research Notes. *Journalism* (2011) 647-659.

these Arab uprisings has been *Ash-sha 'byurid isqat an-nizam*: "The people want to bring down the regime." With Tunisia having succeeded in its protests, a wave of unrest spread in Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen then spread to other Arab countries. The biggest, most organized demonstrations took place on "days of rage" most commonly on Fridays, following their routine afternoon prayers. On October 2011, the Arab uprisings which had started eleven months prior in Tunisia had culminated in the dramatic conquest of three heads of state. After 24 years in sovereignty, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on January 14 due to revolutionary protests. President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt resigned on February 11, 2011 after 18 days of persistent massive protests, ending his presidency of 30-year. In Libya, long-standing leader Muammar al-Gaddafi was killed after his last stronghold Serrt was destroyed by the National Transitional Council's army on October 20, 2011.'

## **2.1 Internet Activism and Its Significance**

Renowned internet activism or cyber activism movements comprise of anti-globalization, global justice movements as well as antiwar movements. For example in the antiwar movement in Iraq, the use of the Internet by activists to convey their messages, organize, and create awareness amongst decentralized networks led to global protests that assembled approximately 10 million activists who were involved in demonstrations in hundreds of cities globally on February 15, 2003.<sup>47</sup> The World Trade Organization (WTO) protest in the year 1999 in Seattle marked the start of the global justice cyber movement, and new communication technologies like social media became channels for assembling protestors in tens of thousands who confronted WTO

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<sup>47</sup> Cortright, D. The movement against war in Iraq. *Nonviolent Social Change: The Bulletin of the Manchester College Peace Studies Institute* (2007).  
[http://www.manchester.edu/academics/departments/peace\\_studies/bulletin/2007/documents/The%20Movement%20against%20War%20in%20Iraq.pdf](http://www.manchester.edu/academics/departments/peace_studies/bulletin/2007/documents/The%20Movement%20against%20War%20in%20Iraq.pdf) Accessed 8 May 2014

delegates.<sup>48</sup> The Internet has also facilitated the creation of various democratic movements and groups like the World Social Forum. The World Social Forum mobilized global justice movements of more than 100,000 activists in Brazil in the year 2003 and in Mumbai in the year 2004.<sup>49</sup>

The social media has of late become significant resource in collective action mobilization and the consequent social movements' creation, organization, and implementation globally. Social media development has created Web-fueled social movements' opportunities, or cyber activism, to modify the collective action landscape. Cyber activism is a developing field of scholarly investigation, even though it is still not well understood, and it largely lacks a clear consistent and cohesive direction.

Langman argues that computer-savvy activists make use of the Internet to start and plan a broad dissention activities spectrum, which include public protests, consumer boycotts as well as demonstrations.<sup>50</sup> In addition, new communication technologies especially social media such as social-networking sites, short messaging services (SMS), and blogs are collectively, a considerable new resource for social movements successful planning and implementation. Technologies related to social media have been used particularly in planning and implementing collective activities, promoting a feeling of community and collective identity amongst group members that are marginalized. In addition, they create less-confined political spaces, establish

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<sup>48</sup> Juris, J. *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization*. (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2008)

<sup>49</sup> Langman, L. From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of interworked social movements. *Sociological Theory*, 23 no. 1 (April, 2005), 42–74.

<sup>50</sup> Langman, L. From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of interworked social movements. *Sociological Theory*, 23, no. 1 (April, 2005), 42–74.

links with other social movements, and publicize causes to obtain support from other communities worldwide.

Besides supporting social and political movements in more conventional ways through the provision of political expression opportunities, collective actors' symbolic identification, and information exchange, the social media may serve a unique instrumental function. In their study to examine the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in the year 2001 and the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002, Della Porta and Mosca established that Internet-based communication technologies offered a significant additional resource for social movements implemented by "resource poor" actors, providing a mass communication means that may have previously been restricted by temporal, financial or spatial constraints.<sup>51</sup>

## **2.2 Social Media and Social Change**

At the end of 2010, in Tunisia's small township of Sidi Bouzid, an extremely poor grocery trader Mohammed Bouazizi set himself ablaze in a community square at a local government office. In his efforts to sell vegetables so as to take care of his single mother and siblings, Bouazizi, was constantly harassed by the area law enforcers, who frequently demanded licenses and bribes resulting to seizing of his stock. His final encounter with the police force was when they destroyed his stock and tools of work and also beat him up.

His death resulted to demonstrations in Sidi Bouzid and spread to almost the entire Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area. Nevertheless, international TV and print media were slow and reluctant in broadcasting the news while state media around MENA either shunned reporting, or reported incorrectly. Most prominent internet sites such as YouTube were restricted by the

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<sup>51</sup> Della Porta, D., & Mosca, L. Global-net for global movements? A network of networks for a movement of movements. *Journal of Public Policy*, 25, no. 1, (May, 2005), 165–190.

internet filter in Tunisia. Facebook, which survived restriction at the time, ended up being a significant stage for spreading reports about the death of Bouazizi and the uprising in Sidi Bouzid. Twitter, even if it is rarely used in Tunisia, was also active in spreading the news of the uprising.<sup>52</sup>

### **2.2.1 The Arab Spring**

In the year 2011 there was a rising tide of protest led by disgruntled citizens across Middle-East and the North Africa against corrupt and autocratic regimes. Termed as the 'Arab Spring', this abrupt wave created some sort of a 'domino effect' with protesters in one country gaining confidence, following and supporting others in different Arab countries. This pattern however is not unprecedented. It has been witnessed in other contexts before. The only novelty in the Arab Spring was the usage of mass of mobile phones, digital media and satellite TV. These tools facilitated the pulling together of disparate groups from Morocco, to Tunisia, to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain around for a common cause transcending borders, bypassing conventional channels of media and openly defying state control.

Social networking podiums in Egypt such as Twitter and Facebook were utilized in announcing and broadcasting the earlier demonstrations of early 2011. Facebook groupings like "We are all Khaled Said" and the Youth Movement of April 6th initiated protests on January, 25th. The strategies and communication of the demonstrations were also spread through usual approaches such as verbal communications, printed brochures and email of a file elucidating the strategies for the demonstrations.

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<sup>52</sup> Vallance, Karla. The Power of Social Media. *Christian Science Monitor*, July 05, 2011., N.PAG

During climax of the protests, the Tahrir Square occupation in Cairo Egypt, Twitter saw up to 45 ‘tweets’ per minute from Egypt alone. Most of these tweets were in English. This facilitated the capturing of global media attention and visibility. Social media also gave protesters information about on how to counter the security forces, using such means as maps with locations for protest meetings along with practical advice on what to do in situations of teargas attacks. As governments frantically tried to crack down on protesters by curtailing all communication systems (Egypt), blocking internet sites that had social networks (Tunisia) or this only powered discontent eventually leading up to their demise.

### **2.2.2 Motivation for Political Action**

Despite of the types of instruments employed in the communication and managing, social transformation needs much work. Even a well-controlled revolution must encounter an activist procedure of social change which involves information acquirement, information growth, distribution and sharing; ideation and notion control; sympathy and emotional link and the dissemination of reliable ideas that motivate cognitive conflict.<sup>53</sup>

A significant factor of inspiring social transformation is persuading people that their involvement will create a difference, particularly if their involvement will need them to encounter individual distress or risk. The task behind social transformation which is a big task is currently frequently linked to the apparatus individual apply to communicate, instead of the individuals behind the task. It worth noting that despite the equipment applied in preparation and organization, from verbal communication to radio and online, similar fundamental codes of inspiration must be

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<sup>53</sup> Cambanis, Thanassis. "Weekend: Now what? They Came Together to Topple Mubarak, but can Egypt's Revolutionaries Agree on what Comes Next?." *The Guardian*: 26. *ProQuest*. Aug 13 2011. Web. 22 Feb. 2012.

utilized. Social media may cause the work of disseminating information effortless, but the duty of persuading people to take individual risks is not minimized.<sup>54</sup>

### **2.3 The Influence of Social Media on Conflict**

Social media is only a channel that may aid in galvanizing public support where a common cause exists and in the right situations. Where there is lack of strong political leadership for alternatives, social media may influence the end result for authoritarian regimes, but play a lesser role in determining the powers that emerge to replace it. However, social media give ‘faceless’ forms of communication to many individuals and even endear others to voice their opinions without worry of being apprehended for contradicting the interests of the powers that be.

The influence of social media has been felt in the North African countries. Such revolutions as the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia have made such great impact in the politics of the country. These changes created a cascading effect in other MENA countries which eventually led to the Arab uprising as we know it today. Social media thus proved to be a major player in shaping political and cultural events that followed. It influenced political and social change in Algeria, Libya and Egypt, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman, Iran, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria.

The uprising caused by social media demanded social and political changes that influenced the toppling of strongmen of the region and subsequent prosecution, killing, exiling and running away of Presidents such as Hosni Mubarak (Egypt), Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (Tunisia) , Ali Abdullah Saleh (Yemen) Muammar Gaddafi (Libya) <sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Daniel Ritter and Alexander Trechsel, “Revolutionary Cells: On the Role of Texts, Tweets, and Status Updates in Nonviolent Revolutions” (paper presented at conference on “Internet, Voting and Democracy,” Laguna Beach, CA, May 14–15, 2011), 3

<sup>55</sup> Ghannam, J. Social Media in the Arab World: Leading to the Uprising, Washington DC, Centre for International Media Assistance (2011) accessed at [www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch-93.aspx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch-93.aspx) on 6th April 2013.

## **2.4 Internet Freedom in the MENA Region**

In 2005, Reporters without Borders (RSF) listed four enemies of the internet as Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Tunisia. In the year 2012, this list increased its members to 12 which included Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia still. Further closer in the year 2011 the same body listed other enemies of the internet with Saudi Arabia and Syria making the list again. In 2011 Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria are listed by RSF as containing citizens in prison.

Internet filtering is more active in the West through software developed specifically for this especially in the MENA region. Reports by the Open Net Initiative indicate that UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, and Tunisia use technologies from the West to block internet content. In Bahrain, websites with skeptical Islam views and dating services were blocked. In Tunisia, internet cafés were required by law to monitor the internet access by their customers and to have the customers provide their national identification numbers.<sup>56</sup>

A study of the Arab media in the year 1997 showed that despite the stringent measures by the governments to censor the internet, online activism has not been annihilated as the use of technology to coordinate and communicate has only increased over the years. The study further indicates that there is vibrant growth of the use of UGC as well as internet activism. Social media activism increased contrary to the regional governments' attempt to curb their usage. It added that users, most the youth, created sites and blogs that they used to transmit their generated material for the world to see.

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<sup>56</sup> Onnik Krikorian “Azerbaijan: Blowing Up in Their Facebook” (Global Voices Advocacy, 10 March 2010) [advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2011/03/10/azerbaijan-blowing-up-in-their-facebook/](http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2011/03/10/azerbaijan-blowing-up-in-their-facebook/).

## 2.5 State Response

Acknowledging that UGC is a powerful tool for social movements, and that it also provides room for contestation between pro-incumbent and pro-democracy groups, the same has been used to track down protesters and detain them in MENA region. The governments were able to use advanced software from the West to block content and in some countries such as Tunisia, Libya and Egypt internet blackouts and slowdowns were established.<sup>57</sup>

Facebook and Twitter have been used by governments to locate key protesters and eventually harassing them. This is done through state security machinery including surveillance. In the Sudan for example, protests against the regime led to state surveillance on social networks culminating to arrests and jail terms for users. This surveillance was instituted when the protests were imminent such that when the protests happened the same protesters were promptly arrested. There were reports that most of the people participating in the Facebook were in actual fact government agents seeking to lure unsuspecting users for ease of locating them for arrests.

In Azerbaijan, influenced by the events reported on Facebook pages about the Egyptian protests, protests were called in early 2011. A 20-year old activist Abbar Savalan from the Popular Front was arrested. He was charged with possession of narcotics; a charge that many of his supporters denied. His lawyer argued that Abbar was actually arrested following the comments he made on Facebook regarding the Egyptian protests. The arrests continued resulting to Amnesty International heavily criticizing the moves by the government that was aimed at discouraging youth activism.

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<sup>57</sup> Hall, Emma. Year after Arab Spring, digital, social media shape region's rebirth. *Advertising Age*, vol. 83, no. 24 (June 11, 2012): 10

In Saudi Arabia, protests called through Facebook and Twitter on 11 March 2011, were swiftly crashed and many arrests made. In Tunisia, the approach was more advanced as it involved theft of user-names and passwords by the government. This was carried out through the injection of phishing scripts into these pages before being sent to the end-user. The Mubarak regime made the boldest move by virtually closing down internet access from midnight of 27/28 January till 2<sup>nd</sup> February at 10:30 GMT. In Libya, the internet was blocked for a long time.<sup>58</sup>

A few hours after the internet was turned on, security forces in Egypt made countless arrests. Bloggers and other social media users were constantly harassed to dissuade them from using the services. These arrests were made based on the criterion of those who had attended, Wael Ghonim, head of marketing of Google Middle East and North Africa arrest. As a result, most people decided to go to the Tahrir Square where they camped for many weeks. They vowed to stay there until Mubarak stepped down or was ousted. Most of these individuals were those who had created potentially “illegal” contents on social media and were afraid if they went home they would be arrested. This indicated that surveillance and crackdowns on the internet users was not going to hamper or disorient revolutions and in fact strengthened their resolve even more. Additionally, it showed the danger that online activists faced.<sup>59</sup>

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Dominick states that beyond having a considerable function of promoting socioeconomic and political arenas; social media has rapidly become a main spring of information of the occurrences

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Internet Filtering in Egypt. *Open Net Initiative.*, From <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/egypt> (2002)

all over the globe.<sup>60</sup> Coupled with the skill of being immediate, social media has immense impact in the approach of the society's actions and relations. Normally, media is expected to be precise and unbiased by being objective in data gathering and coverage so that the customer would be free to make an informed decision.<sup>61</sup> Intended or unintended media coverage of cruel occurrences and broadcasting the same to the people more often than not led to pain and hatred or even an urge to take revenge. Expertise in media coverage is therefore very essential since a misleading story particularly those that sympathetic to some party against the other in any form of dispute could instead fuel the quarrel further. Since social media is hardly controlled, anything of interest spotted by the user could easily be disseminated.<sup>62</sup>

It is thus important to note that currently before an argument takes place, many a times media has already been used for what has been nicknamed "media violence" where all manner of information distortion, disinformation and emotional conflict precede the real physical fighting. A good case in point is the social media effect in North Africa that ended up with the removal from power of Tunisian, Libyan and Egyptian regimes. In mass media, conflicting parties engage with each other by posting harmful information in opposition to their rivals like it happened when CNN gave information that Iraq had dangerous weapons that saw invasion of Iraq by the US and its Western allies resulting to the collapse of Sadaam Hussein's regime during the 2<sup>nd</sup> gulf war. In nations such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, media was very influential to the individual distress what happened at the time of conflict.

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<sup>60</sup> Dominick, J.R, *The Dynamics of Mass Communication: Media in the Digital Age*, (New York, McGraw, 2005) pg 32

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Kan, Charlotte. Arab governments and the Social Media revolution. *Middle East* no. 437 (November 2012): 18.

While categorization and precise figures of deaths vary, it is clear that developing nations have been nearly like a permanent host to the most horrible conflicts happening, considering that these quarrels are devastatingly domestic. From 1990, an enormous 90% of international conflicts associated deaths have been civilians and 80% of them have been females and children.<sup>63</sup> It could therefore be correct to say that a section of the media adversely contributed to the suffering and sometimes deaths of innocent civilians through its reckless and unprofessional reporting.

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<sup>63</sup> Woodhouse, T. et al, *The Prevention, Management and Transportation of Deadly Conflicts* in Contemporary Conflict Resolution (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2007), p159-184

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONFLICT: THE CASE OF THE MAGHREB COUNTRIES IN NORTH AFRICA

#### 3.0 Introduction

The Arab Spring commenced following the death of one Mohammad Bouazizi on December 17, 2010. This individual was a struggling Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire after failed attempts to reacquire his cart from the police after it was “illegally” confiscated. Bouazizi was spat on by a police woman and insulted by the name of his death father when he asked to be given his cart back after failing to pay the fine imposed<sup>64</sup>. The social media immolation caption spread across the Middle East and the North Africa countries and soon protests and demonstrations began. It is therefore true to state that the Arab spring originated from this particular case scenario and spread to Middle East and the North Africa. This act of self-immolation sparked a series of anti-government demonstrations in Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid. The anti-government demonstrations led to the ouster of the Tunisian leader Ben Ali after only ten days after the incident.

In Arab countries, the main factors that acted as catalysts in the anti-government demonstrations that took place involved poor governance economic conditions, unemployment, corruption whether in the government or even within private businesses<sup>65</sup>. Other factors include preventing their citizens from their minimum rights such as in Morocco. Morocco particularly as country

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<sup>64</sup> Boguta, Kovas. "Visualizing The New Arab Mind. *Computational History*," (2011) Retrieved April 9, 2011, from <http://www.kovasboguta.com/1/post/2011/02/first-post.html>,

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

prohibits its private media from reporting the events of revolutions taking place worldwide to segregate its citizens from the protesters and demonstrations.

### **3.1 Background**

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region faces considerable risk of conflict. War, particularly internationalized and interstate civil war, has torn apart the region. Three dimensions, economic, health, and political, are interrelated in triggering the conflict in this region. Political factors in the MENA region outdo all the others<sup>66</sup>. Ethnicity, tribal and sectarianism especially in religion are the other major factors that have kept the MENA region in conflict particularly after the birth of Israeli State in 1948. Tribal and ethnic differences have seen various governments in the region being accused of favoritism in how their income and wealth are distributed. A number of wars have been fought pitting the Arabs against the minority Israelis for almost obvious reasons. The other influential factor is division within the Islamic faithful that has seen the Sunnis fighting the Shiites.

The region has experienced growing demands by the educated youths who have acquired either secondary or university degrees. This has resulted in unemployed youths demanding their rights. Coupled with an increasing access to either regional or international media including social media by the youths, the region governments are unable to contain the increasing criticisms especially in the distribution of revenue and economic activities not to mention mode of governance.

Trend in the MENA region conflicts have a long history starting from 1945 to 2008. This trend indicates that there is a fairly steady and strong increase in the number of conflicts all the way to

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid

the early 1990s, and then declines for the next decade. The upsurge in the 1970s and 1980s is attributed to the Cold War era, whereby the superpowers and their allies battled and supported a wide range of minor conflicts and wars. The waning in the number of conflicts after the end of the Cold War was not immediate, owing to the political instability in a many countries as communist regimes were dispersed. The conflict in the MENA region forms a trend that is not dissimilar to that of other countries. The conflict in this region is solely pinned down to oil dependence<sup>67</sup>.

Among the MENA countries, Israel has its own share of conflicts which are largely instigated by land disagreements. When Israel proclaimed to the world that it was a state, it was attacked by six Islamic, Arab countries namely: Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia.<sup>68</sup> Arab-Israeli wars continued for many years with full scale war breaking out in 1967 and 1973. In the 1948–1949 war, Israel seized half the land that the UN had set aside for Palestinians. The fighting persisted and led to 60,000 Palestinians fleeing their home country from the areas that were under the control of the Israelites. They were forced to join the UN-sponsored refugee camps. In the meantime, several Arab nations seized other lands belonging to Palestine. Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip, while Jordan seized the West Bank of the Jordan River. This shows that the conflicts between and among the MENA countries has long history.

### **3.2 The Arab Uprising in North Africa**

Even though the deposition of most leaders in North Africa took a meager 18 days, the opposition movements that ousted them was a product of a longer process of buildup and planning, a product of years of disenfranchisement and repression that stimulated political

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Craig Kanalley, "Egypt Revolution: A Complete Guide to the Unrest." (2011) Retrieved February 26, 2011, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/30/Egypt-revolution-2011\\_n\\_816026.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/30/Egypt-revolution-2011_n_816026.html)

mobilization. To analyze some aspects of the Arab uprisings without due consideration for historical background would lead to a distinctly biased conclusion.<sup>69</sup>

Analysis has shown that in North Africa, unemployment is highest amongst the university graduates category, a group that is continuously growing. This group incidentally is also one of the most dependent upon the government for source of employment. With aging autocratic leaders, and regimes increasingly ignorant of the needs of the North African citizens, this marginalized group began to mobilize themselves. This mobilization was carried out through the new media in most North African countries.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that when an individual hits 'like' on a Facebook page acts as a testament to challenges that people encounter in their lives, indicates that there is much higher possibility that they will take action. According to the theory of ties' definition of weak ties, they are resourceful in circumstances whereby it does not cost time or effort to assist.<sup>71</sup> As such, in the Arab uprising, the weak ties were used to assist in solving an issue of so much magnitude and effect. The social media revolution in the North African region was based upon the utilization of weak ties to solve an issue that was universal. The issue was universal given that it later came to be replicated in many other Arab countries in Middle East too. For example Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) highlighted the violence of the conflict. Bloody pictures on Instagram and other graphic data posted on social media depicted itself as a uncaring enemy out to execute as many enemies as practically possible.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Cottle, Simon. "Media and the Arab Uprisings of 2011": Research Notes. *Journalism* : (2011) 647-659.

<sup>70</sup> Amin, Ramtin. "The Empire Strikes Back: Social Media Uprisings and the Future of Cyber Activism." *Kennedy School Review*, (2009) 64-6

<sup>71</sup> Papic, Marko & Sean, Noonan. "Social Media as a Tool for Protest | STRATFOR " *Stratfor Global Intelligence*. (2011) Retrieved February 4, 2011, from <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20110202-social-media-toolprotest?>

<sup>72</sup> Rinnawi, Khalil. "Cyber Uprising: Al-Jazeera TV Channel and the Egyptian Uprising." *Language And Intercultural Communication*, 12(2), 118-132

The North African uprising fuelled by social media raises a lot of pertinent questions. These questions are about whether citizen activism can be considered as actual activism and if citizen journalism can be looked at as a source of information and agenda setting. To shed light into these questions is the fact that users of social media can neither be held to ethical benchmarks nor vetted.<sup>73</sup> This acts as both a blessing and a problem depending on the situation at hand or in the cause being championed. For instance, in the North African conflicts, it was more of blessing judging by the outcome which was mass emancipation from tyrannical regimes. From these perspectives therefore, social media remains to be a voice for the many oppressed people. The times for enduring regimes without exercising one's freedoms of expression are on their death beds.

The North African conflict can be attributed to the level of corruption and the lack of political openness. Researches conducted in this region have indicated that there is correlation between the degree of political openness and socioeconomic indicators.<sup>74</sup> North African countries in general have a low quality of governance characterized by low political openness than would be expected for their level of development and income, which is often termed as the governance gap. The governance system in the region has been the major contributor to the conflicts witnessed in this region.

The Tunisian incidence, considered as the trigger, only made the citizens in other North Africa to act rather than endure the political and administrative regimes in their respective countries<sup>75</sup>.

Aided by the new media, the demonstrations in these countries were well coordinated and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Giglio, Mike "How Wael Ghonim Sparked Egypt's Uprising" - Newsweek. (2011) Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/2011/02/13/the-facebook-freedom-fighter.html>

<sup>75</sup> Charlie Beckett. "After Tunisia and Egypt: Towards a New Typology of Media and Networked Political Change," *Polis*, (2011), <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/02/11/after-tunisia-and-egypt-towards-a-new-typology-of-media-and-networked-political-change/> Accessed 8 May 2014

virtually anonymous. This made the demonstrations quite effective favoring the demonstrators rather than the regimes.

Egypt is considered the most populous, powerful and influential Arab state. Like Tunisia, in Egypt, the regime under Mubarak ruler-ship imposed secularization and modernization to Egyptian society by authority, but like Tunisia could not offer rudimentary services for millions of people who were suffering from poverty riddled with unemployment. This aggravated the citizens and seeing what happened in Tunisia, many decided to take matters into their own hands.<sup>76</sup>

Deep political and social evolution that happened in North Africa and lead them to collapse of old dictatorial regimes astonished social scientists, because typically these kinds of dictatorial regimes depicted high range capacity of perpetuity and insolubility. North African revolutions were very popular. These kinds of revolutions are not foreseeable, due to the success of revolutionary movement depending on governmental structures and the reaction of the army. In Tunisia and Egypt, the military did not offer support to the government. On the other hand, persistent protest consequently eroded discipline in the military.

### **3.3 The Arab-Israeli Conflict**

The conflict dubbed Arab-Israeli had existed for a long time with the contention being land ownership. The 1956 Suez Crisis was one of the most dramatic one involving Egypt and Israel. In this particular year, Egypt took control of the Canal. This Canal runs along Egypt's border on the eastern side between Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Suez. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the then

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<sup>76</sup> Howard, Rheingold "The Arab Uprising's Cascading Effects. " *MillerMcCune*. (2011). Retrieved April 6, 2011, from <http://www.millermccune.com/politics/the-cascading-effects-of-the-arab-spring-28575/>

Egyptian president, sent in troops to take over the canal, which was under the control of Britain. This military action was prompted largely by Nasser's frustration over the loss of British and U.S. financial support for the construction of Egypt's Aswan Dam.<sup>77</sup>

This further infuriated the British which made them to strike an agreement with the French and Israeli army to take back the Canal. The formidability of the Israelis armies and the air support of the European forces saw Egypt defeated and the Canal repossessed. Pressure from the USSR and the USA forced the Europeans and the Israelis to surrender the Canal leaving it under the control of Egyptian administration. This led to the culmination of the Suez Canal Crisis.

The second Arab-Israeli conflict erupted in the year 1973; Egypt was involved in another attack that found the Israelis unawares. During this period the Israelis were inflicted heavy casualties. At this time the Egyptians were led by Anwar Sadat while the Israelis were led by Golda Meir. However, both sides arrived at a truce after weeks of fighting.<sup>78</sup> During the Israeli-Arab conflicts, the Palestinians sought for recognition. Despite the fact that UN had granted the Palestinians their own homeland, the bulk of that land had been seized by Israel. This land included the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), called for the formation of a state. However, most guerrilla groups were convinced that the surest way of achieving this was through armed struggle. The PLO chairman by then was Yasir Arafat who ordered several attacks on Israelis. Some of Israel's neighbors collaborated with the organization by allowing the PLO to run from their lands.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36.

### **3.4 The Influence of Social Media on Conflict**

#### **3.4.1 The Beginning of Uprising in Tunisia**

Deemed a police state, Tunisia's administration prior to the uprisings was very repressive with a high rate of human rights violation. The traditional media was not independent as censorship led to the harassment of journalists. The Western media more especially The New York Times and The Wall Street remained silent albeit selling air time particularly to demonstrators who desperately required airtime to pass their information. Civil society groups were not free to criticize the government lest their leaders were arrested and jailed. The low cadre citizens suffered most as they had no voice to present their interests. The general administration was corrupt with the lowly paid police officers unfairly beating anyone that did not offer bribes to them. These conditions led to the rise of the Jasmine Revolution.

#### **3.4.2 The Jasmine Revolution**

In the year 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi set himself ablaze. This was a desperate act of defiance after his attempts to work as a street vendor to support his family were denied. The scenes of this self-immolation act was captured by passers-by and immediately posted on YouTube and circulated in Tunisia and beyond.<sup>79</sup>

Protests arose and on January 11<sup>th</sup> they reached the center of the capital city Tunis. The Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali responded by imposing a night-time curfew. The following day, thousands took to the streets of Sfax; Tunisia's second city with intense demonstrations.<sup>80</sup>

On January 14, 2011, the president fled the country after he was ousted by a spontaneous populous uprising. Tunisia's population of 10 million people became the first people in the Arab

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<sup>79</sup> McCafferty, Dennis. "Activism vs. slacktivism. *Communications Of The ACM*", 54(12), (2011) 17-19.

<sup>80</sup> Jansen, Fieke. "Digital activism in the Middle East: mapping issue networks in Egypt, Iran, Syria and Tunisia." *Knowledge Management For Development Journal*, 6(1), (2010). 37-52.

world to take to the streets and oust a leader. This came as a surprise given that Tunisians are known for their high levels of education and civic pride within the region.<sup>81</sup>

Though Tunisia's government exercised some of the most repressive Internet censorship, the country's population is considered to be one of the most connected in the region outside the Gulf. Going by statistics, 33% of the population is online with 16% on Facebook and 18% using Twitter.<sup>82</sup> YouTube was one of the major sites that were completely blocked during the reign of Ben Ali regime. However, the regime did not entirely block internet access. Consequently, cyber activists managed to re-post Facebook and video contents about protests from private networks' closed loops to online news portals and Twitter with greater reach. Further, the number of Facebook users in Tunisia surged by 8% during the initial weeks of the protests. Most of the users converted from being merely social to basically politics-oriented.<sup>83</sup>

This protest bore fruits eventually as it led to the establishment of a coalition government after elections were conducted.<sup>84</sup> Social media can be held responsible for the Jasmine revolution though not entirely. It can be termed as the tool that many activists used during that time to organize demonstrators by disseminating vital information. The social media was an outlet of decades of underlying political and economic challenges facing them. The oppressed society took advantage of social media to mobilize themselves against the regime.

### **3.4.3 War Against Censorship**

Demonstrations in Tunisia that started on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013 were meant for exerting pressure on the government over unemployment and rising poverty levels. Ultimately, these protests

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<sup>81</sup> Alterman, Jon. "The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted." *Washington Quarterly*, 34(4), (2011) 103.

<sup>82</sup> McCafferty, Dennis. "Activism vs. slacktivism" *Communications of the ACM*, 54(12), (2011) 17-19.

<sup>83</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

culminated in a series of conflicts between internet activists who were against the government's censorship and the counter-attack from the government. This was termed as Operation Tunisia which aimed at activists who targeted government sites with Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks. Afterwards, there were reports of intense widespread counter-attacks which were against the Tunisian bloggers from the government. Reports revealed that these counter-attacks included the capture of their passwords and were also faced internet blockages. In some instances, the government went to the extent of taking control of the web pages and blogs that they deemed 'illegal'.

The war against internet activism was taken to a whole new level. The government stiffened their controls against international news websites such as Al-Jazeera and BBC. To them, these sites were inciting the citizens against the government. The government in Tunisia went ahead to arrest five bloggers and in that group, a rapper Hamada Ben Aoun, was also arrested for composing a song entitled President, Your People Are Dead. Three of the bloggers and the rapper were later released. The US government intervened by expressing their discontent on the Tunisian government's attacks on users of American companies such as Facebook, Google and Yahoo.

### **3.5 The Egyptian Revolution**

Egypt is the most populace country in the MENA region with an approximate population of 80 million people. Consequently, the country has almost 4 million Facebook users which is about 5% of the population.<sup>85</sup> Few days prior to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, tweets trending about the matter increased to 230,000 from 2,300 a day. Videos that depicted the protest and had

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<sup>85</sup> Cambanis, Thanassis.. "Weekend: Now what? They Came Together to Topple Mubarak, but can Egypt's Revolutionaries Agree on what Comes Next?" *The Guardian*: (2011) 26

political commentary went viral with nearly 5.5 million views of the top 23 videos.<sup>86</sup> Further, there was dramatic increase of amount of content produced online by opposition groups through political blogs and Facebook.

Social media was used as tool that was more willing to criticize the authority, and tolerate diversity, than mainstream media and public opinion. The revolution was facilitated by three main categories of people. There were the activists who were the organizers of all religious and political stripes who had come to trust each other over years of minor protests, strikes and mass arrests. Then there were the politicized people formerly afraid to challenge the regime. They brought a distinct agenda to the protests where liberal NGO [non-government organizations] workers, socialists, labor unionists and more conservative religious activists could not dare talk. Finally, there were the hundreds of thousands of apolitical and angry Egyptians tired of Mubarak's police state who were now free to express themselves.

### **3.5.1 Social Media Activism in Egypt**

In Egypt, social media activism played a vital role in instituting reforms in the existing repressive administration. It all began with Wael Ghonim, Google executive, copying a video taken of police officers beating to death an Egyptian businessman Khaled Said.<sup>87</sup> The police had videotaped themselves taking marijuana they had confiscated earlier. The Google executive hoped to stir and capture the attention of the authorities and the general public about the corruption perpetrated by the police.<sup>88</sup> Ghonim also went a step further and created a Facebook page called 'We Are All Khaled Said.' The page featured grotesque mobile phone photos of

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<sup>86</sup> Cottle, Simon. "Media and the Arab Uprisings of: Research Notes." *Journalism* : (2011) 647-659.

<sup>87</sup> Youmans, Lafi., & York, Jillian. "Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements." *Journal Of Communication*, 62(2), (2012) 315-329.

<sup>88</sup> Rinnawi, Khalil. "Cyber Uprising: Al-Jazeera TV Channel and the Egyptian Uprising." *Language And Intercultural Communication*, 12(2), 118-132

Said's face taken from the morgue. These photos undermined the explanation given by the police about the death of Said. This particular Facebook page captured 500,000 followers within Egypt and internationally. Through this means of communication, the protesters were mobilized to assemble at the Tahrir square.<sup>89</sup> The military were there as well keeping a watchful eye on the crowd. The government noted the influence the internet had on the general public and attempted to thwart all internet access. They blocked Facebook and twitter severally. This was not successful as the protesters, aided by others in the Diaspora, managed to subvert the censorship. However, blocking of the internet led to untold losses incurred by many organizations that dealt in internet services. Many vital functions of the private sector and even the government were suspended following the blockage of internet access. Following 18 days of protests, President Hosni Mubarak gave in to the intense pressure and resigned.<sup>90</sup>

### **3.6 Chaos in Libya**

#### **3.6.1 Necessity for Reforms**

The ousted Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi directly opposed parliamentary democracy because to him it was misrepresentation of the people. Those who broke the law in the regime were executed with the mainstream media airing the public hangings and the trials. The regime did little to distribute the wealth acquired through the oil reserve in Libya which is the seventh in the world. Some 20% of Libyan citizens were unemployed with the infrastructure being highly deficient. This was attributed to the high levels of corruption perpetrated by the political elites.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Martin, Matthew. "Social media fuels online activism." *MEED: Middle East Economic Digest*, 56(45), (2012) 20-21

<sup>90</sup> Charlie Beckett. "After Tunisia and Egypt: Towards a New Typology of Media and Networked Political Change," *Polis*, 2011, (2011) <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/02/11/after-tunisia-and-egypt-towards-a-new-typology-of-media-and-networked-political-change/>

<sup>91</sup> Ham, Anthony. "The Road to Revolution." *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 88(1), (2012) 136-145.

The internet and especially the social media enabled Libyan citizens to compare their living conditions with those of other countries to realize that their government was autocratic and repressive.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, the internet acted as an avenue for learning for the many Libyan citizens who were ignorant of their rights and constitutional matters. Criticism of the Libyan regime under Gaddafi would lead to life sentence especially if one had published any information that would in any way undermine or tarnish the reputation of the regime.

### **3.6.2 Effects of Social Media**

The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt produced a domino effect in Libya. This was largely facilitated by the existence of social networks. This is because the governments in those states were already imposing restrictions on the mainstream media making it difficult to access information about the protests except through the internet. Citizen journalism through social media exposed the fighting in Tripoli. Videos posted on YouTube acted as very effective and instrumental tools that encouraged the Libyans too to take to the streets. In Libya, the protesters had more reasons to protest than in any other country due to the fact that Gaddafi had held the reins of power for 41 years and was about to appoint his son as his successor. Following suit, the Libyans hit major social networks as they propagated news about their impending protests. A Facebook page called “The Uprising of the 17<sup>th</sup> February, a Day for Rage in Libya” was started triggered by the events in Egypt. The page posted pictures of the son to Gaddafi squandering taxpayers’ money in Europe in luxurious hotels.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Pack, Jason. Exit Gaddafi: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution/Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution. *Middle East Journal*, 67(2), (2013) 319-322

<sup>93</sup> Hamoudi, Haider. Arab spring, “Libyan liberation and the externally imposed democratic revolution.” *Denver University Law Review*, 89(3), (2012) 699-734.

### **3.6.3 The Influence of Facebook**

On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2011, an invitation posted on Facebook mobilized thousands of people to take to the streets of Tripoli. However, Gaddafi's officers killed two of the protesters and several others were arrested. Consequently, Gaddafi organized a meeting of all Libyan bloggers and internet activists to warn them against going against the interests of the government. Shortly after, a Facebook page was launched and it attracted over 82,000 followers with the name "Uprising of the 17<sup>th</sup> of February". Through social media, the Libyan affairs received unprecedented coverage by the international media.<sup>94</sup> The general public through mobile phones contributed immensely to the dissemination of information that the official media would dare not transmit.

### **3.6.4 Social Media Censoring**

Access to Twitter.com was blocked during the protests in Egypt. This move blocked Twitter users from accessing the site through their mobile phones. However, the activists found a way to circumvent this blockade. They used hootsuite.com which was initially left open by the government. Most activists decided to post messages through hootsuite.com, a server located outside Egypt which meant that it was outside the blockade area. Then the messages would then be directed to Twitter.

This hootsuite was available to Android, Blackberry and iPhone, as it uses a different process than most websites in which the authentication is achieved directly between the hootsuite.com servers and the twitter.com servers. This meant that the Twitter user did not have to use Twitter directly. In this way most activists managed to avoid the blockade through using the hootsuite account and accessing Twitter indirectly through this account. However, this service was not

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<sup>94</sup> Ashish Kumar Sen, "Gadhafi hits social media." *Washington Times, The (DC)*, 1 (2011).

available to laptop and computer users since they used a process referred to as OAuth for authentication. It involves the use of a browser which was susceptible to the blockade.

This shows that the activists still managed to find a way to spread the information in spite of strict controls and regulations by the government. This shows the great significance that social media played in the upsurges in Egypt and the much that the activists were willing to do to be able to access these instrumental tools (social networks).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, social media tools might not have been given undue credit to the success of Arab uprisings. Nevertheless, the activists and citizens behind the mobilization of people through these tools deserve the credit. As much as the world is awed by the power of social media, the sacrifices of the activists should not be overlooked.

Additionally, it is important to know that though there were many other underlying issues (historical injustices) social media is a dangerous tool both for the government and the activists.

<sup>95</sup>The activists can be spied upon through social media while the government can face the wrath of the oppressed citizens through having its injustices exposed to the whole world. It is noteworthy that social media is not the perfect medium for social change communication nor is it a trend that will die with time. On the contrary, it can only get wider and more connected. It is thus important to note that uncontrolled or unprofessional reporting through social media can easily be used to cause discontent among peace loving citizenry resulting to untold suffering. This is not to mention that the same media can also be a tool of positive change as witnessed during the Arab Spring.

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<sup>95</sup> Kan, Charlotte. Arab governments and the Social Media revolution. *Middle East* no. 437 (November 2012): 18.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONFLICT IN THE MAGHREN COUNTRIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

#### 4.0 Introduction

In the recent past, the social media has become a very crucial resource in group action mobilization and the subsequent social movements' formation, management, and implementation internationally. From the discussion, there are various platforms of social media that are frequently used in conflict. It is evident that social networking sites have been maximally used in uprising in Maghreb States in North Africa among other nations. Regularly, computer-savvy protesters use the Internet to initiate and organize extensive dissention tasks, which include public demonstrations, consumer boycotts as well as social related protests. Additionally, modern communication technologies particularly social media such as social-networking sites, short messaging services (SMS), and blogs are significant new resources for social engagements effective planning and realization. Mainly, technologies linked to social media have been used mostly in planning and executing communal events, upholding a sensation of community and communal distinctiveness amongst group members that feel threatened. As a set of Internet-based applications that utilizes the technological and ideological basis of Web 2.0, social media enables the establishment and exchange of user-generated content. Half a decade ago, 22% of the time spent online internationally was spent in social media and blog sites. The international average time spent per individual on social media sites is now roughly five and a half hours per month.<sup>96</sup> To manage social media influence most countries in North Africa put

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<sup>96</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36

restrictive measures to curb usage. Nevertheless, the 2010 uprising in Tunisia following the suicide by Bouzizi shows clearly that, even if facebook, YouTube and Twitter were under restrictions at that time in Tunisia, they were highly used to spread news about that uprising. Facebook and YouTube were particularly used to share original videos internationally thereby engaging the Diaspora's opinion on the happenings. UGC played a major role in the Maghreb Nations uprisings and protests. For instance, the UGC set in mobile phones was specifically crucial since it enabled those witnessing or taking part in the protests to upload content during the period of the protests and make report on live occurrences. In addition, it is also clear that Mobile phones were used by activists and protesters to commune with protestors and spread their information. For instance, in the year 2001, the overthrow of the Philippines President, Estrada, was and has been regarded as an "SMS revolution" since it was done through extensive use of text messages to mobilize demonstrators to push for and congregate his removal. Social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter were the principal online tools that individuals around the globe use to distribute this content.<sup>97</sup>

Social networking sites in Egypt like Twitter and Facebook were used in publicizing and broadcasting the previous protests of early 2011. Facebook groupings like "We are all Khaled Said" and the Youth Movement of April 6th instigated protests. Facebook was also used in broadcasting protests in different other nations in the MENA region, where it is evident that nearly each plan to demonstrate at the beginning of 2011 was encouraged by numerous category of Facebook page, event or grouping. UGC was used to talk about the protests nationwide, regionally and globally, and to offer live reporting, information and opinions. News was

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<sup>97</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36

commonly disseminated on Twitter, where the demonstrators frequently had their individual hash tags. Furthermore, UGC aided in initially guiding the globe's concern to the uprising in Egypt and Tunisia, and later to other countries, managing the self-governing efforts of the whole region. It acted as an avenue for the distribution of news around revealing matters not relayed by, or past the reach of the typical media. These cases clearly show the commonly used platforms by social media in conflict.<sup>98</sup>

## **4.1 Emerging Issues**

### **4.1.1 The Influence of Social Media on Conflict**

It is evident in that the latest protests in various Maghreb Countries have been termed as “Facebook revolutions” and “Twitter revolutions” due to the widespread use of user-generated content via social networks sites like Twitter and Facebook by activists, protesters and their followers, and also by people following the happenings around the globe. First, Twitter is termed as a real-time network since it can hook up a person with the most up-to-date information about what they find fascinating.

First, social media technologies were responsible for social movements planning and implementation, promoted a feeling of community and collective identity amongst the group members who happened to be the oppressed and marginalized citizenry. The rise of cyberactivism movements in the Maghreb member states gave room for the marginalized to run into the streets to demand/force a change of regime. Through social media, methods of fighting back the security agencies were shared by providing escape routes and maps. Through this, the

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<sup>98</sup> Juris, *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization*. (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2008)

masses were able to circumvent arrests and beat law enforcers. By using social media the activists were able to heartily appeal to the masses for support the demonstrations without looking back.

Secondly, social media promoted the ideation of collective action mobilization where it persuaded people that their involvement was crucial in creating a better society, and that it will also create a difference at long last when they influence social change. Social media further helped in social movements creation, organization and implementation of set goals. As a result the agitated population were able to come together to protest against the regimes. Through the User Generated Content (UGC) concept, the protesters were able to exchange or disseminate information pertaining to the demonstrations or happenings around them to the world. For instance, the UGC sent through mobile phones was specifically crucial since it enabled those witnessing or taking part in the protests to upload content during the period of the protests and make report on live occurrences. In addition, it is also clear that mobile phones were used by activists and protesters to commune with protestors and spread their information. To a large extent therefore, social media broadcasted events and happenings that led to the overthrow of the then strongmen of the MENA region.<sup>99</sup> For example in Tunisia, the self immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi that was captured through social media gave birth to an agitated and aggressive mass movement that took less than a month to dislodge President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In Egypt, the posting of video images of brutally murdered Khaled Said by Wael Ghonim through Yu Tube ignited the masses again the reign of President Hosni Mubarak. Likewise, the protests in Libya were triggered by the posting of a video clip of Gaddafi's son squandering tax payers' money in Europe while the common man suffered in poverty.

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<sup>99</sup> Howard, Rheingold "The Arab Uprising's Cascading Effects. " *MillerMcCune*. (2011). Retrieved April 6, 2011, from <http://www.millermccune.com/politics/the-cascading-effects-of-the-arab-spring-28575/>

#### 4.1.2 The Role of State Oppression

When a state becomes rogue and persecutes its citizens with a view to restricting them from participating in their civic rights, it creates room for rebellion which the media is expected to highlight. This comes about in the form of human rights abuse, police brutality, imprisonment, extrajudicial punishments, and many other forms of government discrimination. Totalitarian or dictatorial regimes have used police, death squads or military to suppress their citizens. Media, which for all practical purposes is the advocate for the oppressed and protector justice reports. However, if for instance it fails to air their grievances, citizens themselves take charge through citizen journalism. The latter was what brought down long serving presidents in the MENA region. In essence, state oppression gives rise to dissidence with law abiding citizens turning against the regime sometimes violently. Such oppression has been the cause of the very many coups that have taken place particularly in Africa. Having no other means to ventilate their problems, citizens of MENA region countries took to using social media to tell the world what was happening in their various countries.

In the case of Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, citizens were demanding better living conditions with cost of living having shot through the roof, lack of employment for the youth among others. Essentially, MENA governments had failed their nationals hence the resolve by the citizen to remove them from power.<sup>100</sup> For example, prior to the protests and riots during the Arab Spring, the regional governments had curtailed free press including occasional shutting of internet. Countries like Iran had superior technological software to harness usage of social media as well as censoring websites while also monitoring activists. Tunisian government even attempted to

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<sup>100</sup> Rinnawi, Khalil. "Cyber Uprising: Al-Jazeera TV Channel and the Egyptian Uprising." *Language And Intercultural Communication*, 12(2), 118-132

redirect social media users to different web pages with the aim of capturing the identities and passwords. This angered the citizens to a point of using social media to disseminate whatever information they came across. The same was used to organize and mobilize mass action leading to the removal of the dictators.

#### **4.1.3 The Borderless Nature of Social Media**

Social media is borderless in that a single occurrence in one state can escalate to other countries without border limitations. From the discussion, there are various cases of issues that circulated in the social media thereby rolling up their effects beyond the borders of the country they originated from. For instance, the events that took place in Tunisia spiraled to the neighboring states within less than a month leading to the overthrow of the regimes that were there then. The Internet has also led to the formation of numerous democratic associations and societies like the World Social Forum which mobilized international justice movements of over 100,000 protesters in Brazil in 2003 and in Mumbai in 2004.<sup>101</sup>

Secondly, the protests in Arab states in North Africa demonstrate a radical wave of demonstrations that spread to the whole of the Arab states. These protests were as a result of the initial uprisings that occurred in Tunisia on December, 2010 after Mohammed Bouazizi's suicide in remonstrance of police mistreatment and corruption.<sup>102</sup> Within a year, this uprising spread over and resulted to key changes in its stir: uprising in Tunisia and Egypt that resulted to the collapse of two governments; civil protests in Yemen and Syria; a civil conflict in Libya leading to the collapse of its government; main uprisings in Oman, Iraq, Algeria Morocco, Jordan and

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<sup>101</sup> Langman, "From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of interworked social movements". *Sociological Theory*, 23, no. 1 (April, 2005), 42

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

Bahrain, small uprisings in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Sudan.<sup>103</sup> In these Arab states, the uprisings assumed the form of constant campaigns that were done by numerous normal citizens by applying the same approaches of civil opposition: rallies, strikes, protests and marches. Mostly, essential to the uprising process also has been the use of social media to commune, raise alertness, manage and convey danger alerts among the numerous activists in the face of country endeavors at internet restrictions, suppression, crowd management and to some degree physical harassment to the point of activists being compacted or shot in cold blood. With Tunisia having sailed through in its demonstrations, a wave of instability stretch in Libya, Algeria Yemen, Egypt and Jordan then extend to other Arab states.

Thirdly, following the death of Bouazizi and the unrest in Sidi Bouzid, Twitter, even if it is seldom used in Tunisia was very active in disseminating information of the revolution.<sup>104</sup> Around the globe, many of those whose attention was in the occurrence in Tunisia were using social media to get information about the happenings. This was a motivation to the people all over the region, for example the Egyptian activist Gigi Ibrahim, who after realizing through social media about the fall of the Tunisia's President, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali regime, wrote in Twitter "The Tunisian revolution is being twitterised, an account is being written down by the people #sidibouzid #Tunisia." All these incidences in the Arab states of North Africa and Middle East clearly indicates that social media is borderless.

Finally and more fundamentally, the changed mode of conflict from being interstate to intra state, has necessitated the paradigm change of transmitting information. The traditional mass

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<sup>103</sup> Cottle Simon, "Media and the Arab uprisings of 2011: Research notes", *Journalism*, (2011) 12(5) 647.

<sup>104</sup> Vallance Karla, "The power of social media". *Christian Science Monitor*, July 05, (2011), N.PAG

media which is largely controlled hence can't disclose as much information thus failing to appeal to the public as does social media that disseminates raw information.

## 4.2 Other Issues

In media, gate keeping is the process by which editors manage the streaming of news, deciding what is retained, what is allowed, and how that information is set to reach their anticipated audiences. With the growth of the Internet and other technologies in present times, contemporary institutions have been pushed to reassess their communication means. Across the media arena, the digital podiums that enable users to connect, work together, and share out information have also forced conventional institutions to reorganize the way the streaming of information is shaped. Most of the institutions have reacted to these modern challenges by working hard to make use of digital media podiums like social media and blogs. Nevertheless, these institutions have regularly found it hard to entirely integrate newer media designs, frequently choosing those technologies wholly or setting an anxiety among decentralized media designs and processes. Thus, authorities should be able to control social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to spread sensitive information and reach huge audiences.

However, this is not the case in social media. There is lack gate keeping in social media thereby going beyond the control of the various authorities. From the discussion, it seems there is great lack of gate keeping at both national and regional levels. Various governments are not in a position to manage the way information is disseminated across the social media.<sup>105</sup> The rate of usage of social media and the speed at which information is spread, the number of users as well

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<sup>105</sup> Rinnawi, Khalil. "Cyber Uprising: Al-Jazeera TV Channel and the Egyptian Uprising." *Language And Intercultural Communication*, 12(2), 118-132

as the geographical reach makes it hard to control it. On the other hand, Twitter is regarded as an instantaneous network that connects a person to the newest information about what they find fascinating. The same case applies to YouTube. It allows people to distribute and upload video clips with ease through the Internet by use of mobile phones, blogs, websites and email.<sup>106</sup>

A good example showing lack of gate keeping was in the uprising following the suicide in Sidi Bouzid and the entire area of MENA. Huge volumes of internet websites like YouTube were limited by the social media filter in Tunisia. Facebook, which was not limited at the time, ended up being a major podium for disseminating information concerning the death of Bouazizi and the unrest in Sidi Bouzid. Worth noting is that even if Twitter and YouTube were restricted in Tunisia, they were still very active in disseminating the information about the uprising. This implies that despite the government restrictions on the social media there lacked effective gate keeping mechanisms. Furthermore, due to the fact that information on social media reached users at different parts of the globe, it wasn't possible for governments like that of Tunisia to control users outside Tunisia from discussing the uprising. All around the globe, a lot of users whose concentration was in the occurrence in Tunisia were making use of Twitter and Facebook to discover about the happenings in Tunisia.

For instance, in 2011 there was a growing surge of uprising pioneered by discontented citizens across North Africa and Middle-East against corrupt and oppressive reigns was activated very fast through social media.<sup>107</sup> In Egypt for example, at the peak of the uprising, the Tahrir Square activity in Cairo Egypt, Twitter had approximately 45 'tweets' per minute in only Egypt most of

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<sup>106</sup> Della Porta & Mosca, "Global-net for global movements? A network of networks for a movement of movements". *Journal of Public Policy*, 25, no. 1, (May, 2005), 165.

<sup>107</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36

which were in English. This led to the capturing of international media interest and visibility. Social media also spread to protesters information how to counteract the security forces, by applying such methods as maps with specific sites for protest meetings together with practical guidance on how to behave in cases of teargas attacks. As authorities anxiously made effort to crack down on demonstrators by restricting all communication systems in Egypt, jamming online sites that had social systems in Tunisia though it could not do the same internationally thereby making it hard for them to take control. It is however possible to shut communication system should any government feel threatened. For example, the American government was able to shut down communication in both Uganda and Tanzania when President Obama was visiting, an indication that with sufficient capable equipment, governments are able to control even social media within their jurisdiction.

Social media use has become a basic instrument of social change throughout the globe. Nevertheless, it is evident from literature that the social media use is not only at national level but also at regional level. The discussion shows that the use of social media is more evident in the Middle East region as well as in North Africa region where specific countries has been discussed in relation to the use of social media. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube played a significant function in the Arab Spring, the social protests in 2010 that extended from Tunisia to Libya to Egypt to Yemen and to other states in the Middle East.<sup>108</sup>

Considering the use of social media at national level, several countries like Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria has been discussed extensively, clearly showing the great use of social media at

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<sup>108</sup> Charlie Beckett, *After Tunisia and Egypt: Towards a New Typology of Media and Networked Political Change*, *Polis*, 2011, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/02/11/after-tunisia-and-egypt-towards-a-new-typology-of-media-and-networked-political-change/> Accessed 8 May 2014

the countries level. For instance, in the antiviolence movement in Iraq, the use of the social media by activists to transmit their messages, manage and create consciousness among decentralized networks resulted to international protests that brought together roughly 10 million activists who participated in protests in hundreds of cities internationally in 2003.<sup>109</sup> The World Trade Organization (WTO) demonstration in 1999 in Seattle was the beginning of the international justice cyber society, and fresh communication technologies such as social media became avenues for bringing together a big number of demonstrators who faced up to WTO delegates.<sup>110</sup> The social media has also facilitated the formation of different democratic movements and assemblies such as the World Social Forum which mobilized international justice movements of over 100,000 protestors in Brazil in 2003 and in Mumbai in 2004.<sup>111</sup> In Tunisia demonstrations following the suicide by Bouzizi had made the Tunisia's government put in place some of the highly suppressive social media restrictions. Nevertheless, the state's population is deemed to be highly in the use of social media in the area outside the Gulf. Research shows that a third of the population is connected to social media with 18% in Twitter and 16% on Facebook.<sup>112</sup> YouTube was among the main sites that were totally restricted during Ben Ali regime. Nonetheless, the reign did not completely restrict social media access. Additionally, the number of registered users in Facebook in Tunisia rose by 8% in the first weeks of the demonstrations.<sup>113</sup> This protest bore fruits eventually as it led to the establishment of a

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<sup>109</sup> Cortright, D. "The movement against war in Iraq. *Nonviolent Social Change: The Bulletin of the Manchester College Peace Studies Institute*.

[http://www.manchester.edu/academics/departments/peace\\_studies/bulletin/2007/documents/The%20Movement%20against%20War%20in%20Iraq.pdf](http://www.manchester.edu/academics/departments/peace_studies/bulletin/2007/documents/The%20Movement%20against%20War%20in%20Iraq.pdf) Accessed 8 May 2014

<sup>110</sup> Juris, *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization*. (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2008)

<sup>111</sup> Langman, "From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of interworked social movements". *Sociological Theory*, 23, no. 1 (April, 2005), 42

<sup>112</sup> McCafferty, Dennis. "Activism vs. slacktivism" *Communications of the ACM*, 54(12), (2011) 17-19.

<sup>113</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36

coalition government after elections were conducted.<sup>114</sup> Social media can be attached to the Jasmine uprising though not totally. It can be named as the instrument that majority of the activists made use of during the era to manage protestors by channeling essential information. In Egypt which is the highest populated state in the MENA area with a population of about 80 million citizens. Accordingly, the Egypt has a population of over 4 million in Facebook which is roughly 5% of the population<sup>115</sup> a bigger population is also in Twitter since a few days ahead of the president's resignation, tweets talking about the issue rose by a 100% from 2,300 to 230,000 a day. Videos that illustrated the demonstration and had political interpretation rose with almost 5.5 million views of the most watched 23 videos.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, there was striking rise of quantity of content created in social media by resistance groups by use of political blogs and Facebook. Social media was utilized as an instrument that was very ready to censure authority, and endure diversity, than conventional media and community opinion. In Libya, the protests in Tunisia and Egypt resulted to an effect within Libya. This was basically facilitated by the means of social networks. The rise in social media was as a result of the increased governments imposing limitations on the conventional media making it hard to get information about the uprisings except through the social media. Videos put on YouTube ended up being very efficient and influential instruments that encouraged the people of Libya to get to demonstrations. Following the citizens will to oust Gaddafi the Libyans get to main social networks as they circulated information about their impending uprisings.<sup>117</sup> From the discussion, it is also evidence that the use of social media is at its maximum in North Africa and Middle East regions. It is

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid

<sup>115</sup> Cambanis, Thanassis.. "Weekend: Now what? They Came Together to Topple Mubarak, but can Egypt's Revolutionaries Agree on what Comes Next?" *The Guardian*: (2011) 26

<sup>116</sup> Cottle, Simon. "Media and the Arab Uprisings of: Research Notes." *Journalism* : (2011) 647-659.

<sup>117</sup> Hamoudi, Haider. Arab spring, "Libyan liberation and the externally imposed democratic revolution." *Denver University Law Review*, 89(3), (2012) 699-734.

crucial to note that presently before a disagreement occurs, media is being used for what has been given the name “media violence” where all fashions of propaganda, disinformation and poignant conflict precedes the real physical warfare. A good example is the social media consequence in North Africa that resulted to the ousting of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt reigns. In countries such as Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina, media was very prominent to the people anguish that occurred at the era of conflict.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The fact that social media has no formal control makes its use a free for all network that can be used to disseminate any information a user wishes to pass. In this case, sometimes social media users have been able to disseminate information that turned to incite the public against their regimes in some cases leading to drastic changes. In this case therefore, the usually government controlled information channeling has greatly been curtailed by the emergence of un-gated citizen journalism through social media. Nowadays, general public and civil society in particular easily obtain information that was previously hard to get and deliberate on it with a view to either support of reject government policies.<sup>118</sup>

It is therefore important to note that social media helped ignite and spread violence in a number of countries like was the case in MENA region not forgetting to mention that other underlying factors were also at play. It therefore calls for more research to find out how best can social media have gate keeping mechanism in order to put the generator of any information (UGC)

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<sup>118</sup> Ghannam, J. Social Media in the Arab World: Leading to the Uprising, Washington DC, Centre for International Media Assistance (2011) accessed at [www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch-93.aspx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch-93.aspx) on 6th April 2013.

posted in social media be held accountable for any subsequent reactions that may injure the wellbeing of the society.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 Summary

As a collection of internet based applications, social media allows the creation and sharing of user generated content with ease. With currently above ten different applications and not forgetting that they continue being developed, social media provides an instant sharing of data hence the reason it is most suitable for resource mobilization. Its ability to quickly organize and mobilize multitudes for a common cause gives social media a head start in dealing with issues political and social change. If not well contained, social media could easily advance fragmentation of an already polarized state. Thus social media is more of a dissent setter than a conciliation agitator. Though, not even ten years since it came into being, social media has accelerated creation of prominent social movements or cyberactivism globally. Not only did revolutionary groups in the conflict region adopt its usage but also Governments and other political groupings. They all use social media to propagate their agendas, or seek world attention like was the case in North Africa.<sup>119</sup> Simply put, social media has been an easy tool to quickly organize decentralized networks thereby mobilizing interest group for a cause. For example, it was used to mobilize over 10 million activists involved in anti-globalization demonstrations in hundreds of cities globally on February 15, 2003. This essentially sees the usage tilt towards the powerless dissenting against the powerful. This has seen the rise in usage of social media during popular revolts as well as in other social change including political campaigns. Social media appear to be encouraging transfer of geopolitical power from governments to individuals as well

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<sup>119</sup> Cambanis, Thanassis.. “Weekend: Now what? They Came Together to Topple Mubarak, but can Egypt’s Revolutionaries Agree on what Comes Next?” *The Guardian*: (2011) 26

as to institutions that the dissatisfied create. This is especially due to increasing use of social media that is encouraging devolution of power from central governments to local authorities.<sup>120</sup> The Uprising in the Arab world is a classic example of the influence of social media in social change. The fact that the uprising in the MENA region was largely triggered by increasing volumes of social media content that was uncensored, is an indicator that individuals vested with the responsibility of providing necessary environment for national development ought to be well versed with social media usage in order to react quickly and respond to raised by the aggrieved persons. It is important to realize that social media is a podium through which competition of ideas and a campaign for influence is on the increase. Internet activism is thus gaining strength and significance in the fight and agitation for political freedom and democracy.

## **5.2 Key Findings**

From the critical analysis of the role of social media in conflict, it is evident that there are numerous platforms which are commonly used by social media activists in various states to create awareness, control, organize and support and even spread information about uprisings either nationally, regionally or even globally. Owing to the fact that there are numerous active registered users in YouTube, Twitter, Facebook among others and the fact that information once posted on these platforms can reach millions of users at once, the spread of any piece of information becomes very easy, fast and efficient. Furthermore, it is evident that the extent of the social media is not only national, but also regional as well as global. This implies that any post in the social media platforms can be retrieved at the state level even when it is posted outside the region or globally and with no single limitation. Also, there is lack of gate keeping in the social media since it is not even easy or possible to control the media by governments owing to the fact

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<sup>120</sup> Cambanis, Thanassis.. “Weekend: Now what? They Came Together to Topple Mubarak, but can Egypt’s Revolutionaries Agree on what Comes Next?” *The Guardian*: (2011) 26

that the information spreading is so fast and even goes beyond the area of control by the specific government. In essence this implies that general publics in possession of Smart phones are able to capture and disseminate incriminating evidence against government brutality. Moreover, the borderless nature of social media is such that in a single occurrence in one state can easily and fast escalate to other states without facing border limitations. This is evidence in the way the uprisings in Tunisia were activated through social media by not only activists in other Arab states of North Africa like Libya and Egypt but also from nationals in the Diaspora particularly within the MENA region. Similar protests later spread to these countries<sup>121</sup>.

This discussion has analyzed the role of social media systems in the MENA region uprisings especially around year 2011 by applying a content study of main basis of social media channels as well as exploring the extent and the gate keeping concept in MENA region. Though there is a collection of opinion as to how prominent social media was in developing political mobilization in the Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Middle East uprisings.<sup>122</sup> This discussion clearly indicates that its major roles were in offering managerial infrastructure, as a form of another medium, and as well as creating awareness both nationally and globally of the constant revolution. By analyzing the manner in which the protestors used the social media platforms through well-built communication theories, it is evidence how the inbuilt distinctiveness of social media and the Internet were in a position to cultivate the essential requirements for collective accomplishment. Nevertheless, regardless of its success in managing the uprisings, it is clear especially from the present state in Egypt that the social media has not been fully useful in conveying the demands of demonstrators into political certainty. It is also clear that development in communication

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<sup>121</sup> Cottle, Simon. "Media and the Arab Uprisings of: Research Notes." *Journalism*; (2001) 647-659.

<sup>122</sup> Rinnawi, Khalil. "Cyber Uprising: Al-Jazeera TV Channel and the Egyptian Uprising." *Language And Intercultural Communication*, 12(2), 118-132

technologies have considerably distorted the social media's function in conflict resolution. International and regional social systems and the Internet enable new actors, primarily NGOs and individuals, to vigorously take part in conflict resolution as well as in uprisings. Growth in technology has challenged nations, but simultaneously provides them with new instruments to achieve their goals.

However, it is important to note that governance situation in the affected countries was at its lowest ebb. The governments, most being authoritarian exercised excessive force when dealing with the opposition besides denying citizen participation in public affairs. Coupled with high unemployment more especially university graduates, skewed resource allocation, lack of the rule of law among other structural problems made it easy for the already hopeless society to gang up against the regimes.<sup>123</sup>

The Arab Uprising indicates that technologies and distinctiveness of social media are a great challenge to authorities hence need for them to realize quickly. Now that social media has broken the monopoly of the traditional media in exposing to the public even damaging occurrences, it is high time regimes restructured governance styles by encouraging public participation and dialogue or else the opposition will take advantage to dislodge them or cause terror. Though social media has promoted dissemination of user generated content broadly and quickly, there are dangers of being monitored by government agencies.

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<sup>123</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36

In conclusion, the uprising in MENA region is politically historical in the sense that the public that had remained silent for decades rose against authoritarian leaders and demanded their social justice and democracy.<sup>124</sup>

### **5.3 Recommendations**

An analysis on the role of social media in the vibrant processes connected to violent quarrels or their escalation calls for the following recommendations. First, extensive study is vital so as to explore the link between conflict and social media. For conflict control goals, it is very vital to expand the knowledge of a national, regional and global role of social media in conflict control in eras of democratic change.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, for the social media to have a sustainable conflict control function, the encouragement of each state's national social media growth in liaison with the creators of social media platforms could see to it that social media play a sovereign role in supporting democratic values, disseminating realistic information, and monitoring responsible and transparent governance. Thirdly, before external participation it is very important that comprehensive analyses of the state situation are carried out. This entails analysis of information requirements, the degree and attributes of social media freedom, permanence and legislation. Equally national governments should track individuals in social media to ensure that the information disseminated is truthful and positive as well as international governments and agencies keeping watch to ensure that corrupt regimes do not mistreat activists campaigning for positive change in their respective states.

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<sup>124</sup> Obtained from [www.http://connections-gj.org/node/5809/edit](http://connections-gj.org/node/5809/edit) on 23rd Sept. 2014

<sup>125</sup> Khoury, Machool. "Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance." *Policy Futures In Education*, 5(1), (2007) 17-36

Being a relatively new concept in the field of information communication and technology (ICT) and not withstanding its influence in the society, social media ought to find a special place in the academia. This is with aim of finding out how best it can be utilized to avoid misuse since both the governments and private individuals were culprits and probably recommend mechanisms that make users accountable for contents they post for audience consumption. Introduction of gate keeping at regional and/or international levels could be considered.

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