REVIEWING THE ROLE OF FACEBOOK IN EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION IN FEBRUARY 2011

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ABSTRACT

The Main purpose of this study is to review the role of social media, Facebook in particular, in the Egyptian revolution in February. The main questions include: Has the development of social media, such as Facebook, been effective in the success of this revolution? Can this development lead to other changes or revolutions? Is it true that information technology had an effective role in this revolution? Reuters calls it "Revolution caused by Facebook" and Alec Ross, Hillary Clinton's chief advisor, calls Internet "the 21st Century Che Guevara", to what extent, are these statements true? Adopting the library-document research method, in response to these questions we must say Facebook and other social media had an effective role in directing the revolution through three roles: calling for protests, managing the gathering and movements of participants, and distributing news and information. The effect was so high that some call it an example of "Internet Revolution" which is great change in culture stemming from social media. Furthermore, considering the rapid development of modern communication tools and their usage in sociopolitical changes, more changes and revolutions are very likely. In fact, the Egyptian Revolution can be called a Facebook Revolution and 21st Century Che Guevara, because Facebook accelerated its developments.

Keywords: Facebook, Egyptian Revolution in February

INTRODUCTION

In 2003, when RAND Foundation Research Center attempted to predict the future of information technology in the Middle East and North Africa, few people, particularly Egyptian leaders, could envisage a revolution in their country. AND Foundation Research Center, an American nonprofit institute, published a report in 2003 about the future of information technology in the Middle East and North Africa saying, "Countries of this region ,except Turkey, will delay the information revolution, because their regimes are not fairly selected and democracy is not observed. Therefore, they will target the flow of information in the society because free information flow contradicts their existence. The reports predicts that Western regimes will control all information resources and all its distribution tools. This is true of audiovisual devices and they will try to direct public mind in their own favor. When satellite expanded and got out of their control, they sought to control new media i.e. the Internet."

The Egyptian revolution was a clear proof of this prediction, since people barely expected to enjoy freedom after 30 years of dictatorship ruling with cruelty. No one could envisage that a regime, which has suppressed any wave of change, would fall down in 18 days by protesting on Facebook and Twitter pages, which is in itself a record in the history of world revolutions.

Plan

In the formation of any revolution, many factors are involved, some of which are accelerators such as social media. How effective were social media, Facebook in particular, in formation of Egyptian revolution is the main concern in this study. It revolves around three key questions, 1. Has the development of social media like Facebook contributed to the revolution's success? 2. Can these media's development lead to future changes and revolutions? 3. Can we believe that information technology had an enormous effect on Egyptian revolution' success, Reuters calls it "Revolution caused by Facebook" and Hillary Clinton's chief advisor calls Internet "the 21st Century Che Guevara", to what extent, are these statements true?

Theoretical Concepts

- *Facebook*

Facebook is the company creating Facebook Website which was created on February 4th, 2004. It is a virtual social network through which you can share photos, films or messages with friends who have a user account. People around the world can use it for free. The creator of Facebook is Mark Elliot Zuckerberg (Wikipedia 2012).

- *Egyptian Revolution in February*

2011 Egyptian Revolution (January 25th) is a series of civil protests and disobedience which began on January 25th,2011 and led to resignation of Hosni Mubarak on February 11th, 2011 and establishment of military government in the country. Inspired by Tunisian Revolution, oppositions announced that purpose of their protests is to fight torture, poverty, corruption, unemployment, Hosni Mubarak's downfall, abolishing rules of emergency, increasing minimum wages, ending violence, and more importantly, establishing a democracy with a democratic government (Wikipedia, 2011).

Theoretical Principles

Although different theories can be adopted to establish theoretical principles of the issues in question, the main focus of the present study is on the theory of "New Media", based on which, new media are a distinctive series of communication technologies which are digital and accessible to citizens for personal uses. So, the concept of new media includes, "experiencing a new text, new methods of representing the world, new relations between subjects and media technologies, new relations between body, identity and community, new patterns fo organization and production" (Mehdizadeh, 2010: 301).

"The Internet is a clear example of new media having the aforementioned features. In addition to producing and distributing the message, it also processes, exchanges, shares and saves information which is a private institution but functions as a public communication and is not organized bureaucratically" (ibid: 302).

Marc Poster considers the nature of Internet "uncertainty." This feature is not only because of its post-modernity. Internet, as a "new Medium" goes beyond the limitations of printing and

distributing in communication. Because via Internet, 1) conversation among many people becomes a possibility,2) Simultaneously receiving, modifying and redistributing cultural material,3) Communicative action is displaced from spatial relations,4) Quick global communication becomes a possibility,5) Media convergence in the form of network is created (ibid:302). In his book, " The Second Media Age ", Poster claims that spread of electronic ICT has a significant influence on our lifestyles and views about ourselves and our environment; because this expansion transforms the network of social relations and "symbolic transition" (from the age of orality to the age of written exchange and electronic communications).

In this regard, with the emergence of new communication tools and media such as cell phone, satellite televisions and Internet, the world enters "The Second Media Age" which is fundamentally different from "The First Media Age." The second media age, which, according to theoreticians, has coincided with emergence and development of a new kind of society, has emerged through combination of new satellite communication technologies with computer, TV and telephone. In the second media age, the exclusive contrast between producers and consumers of messages will disappear, and not only will production not be unilateral, it also will not be monopolized by a particular group. To be more precise, each medium carries a particular message and culture. Hence, the new electronic media carry a particular message and culture which will spread if the media expand. Among these new media, we can point to the role of computer and Internet (Mehrdad, 2011: 52).

Entering the second media age, considering its unique features and development of networked society and technological developments, puts emphasis on his belief that "global ICT can accelerate extraordinary political, cultural and economic changes in the 21st century. It is predicted that global communication systems like Internet will transform physical and symbolic environments around the world" (Estin & Sina, 2004: 121). Good examples of this include using modern communication tools like Internet and using different social networks like Twitter, Youtube and Facebook, all of which accelerated sociopolitical changes in such countries as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Methodology of the Research

Library-document method of research has been adopted in this study and plug-taking is used. The time of research is between September and December of 2012.

Egypt and Its Developments

Egypt is an important and influential country in the Arab world and Africa. Its population is 80 million, %51/2 men and %48/8 women. The literacy rate is %71/4. An average American family's income is three times larger than that of Egyptian's. Forty percent of the population is below the poverty line and their daily income is two dollars. In raking of countries based on freedom of speech, out of 168 countries, Egypt was 133rd.

After the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, Mubarak took control of the country. He extended his presidency in 1987, 1993, 1999, respectively for the second, third and fourth time, each term 6 years. It was only in 2005 that he had a rival candidate but only 30 percent of the eligible took part in election. In 2006, Mubarak introduced himself the Egyptian lifetime

president. The start of unrest and street and Internet protests, on February 11, 2011, caused Mubarak to resign after 18 days.
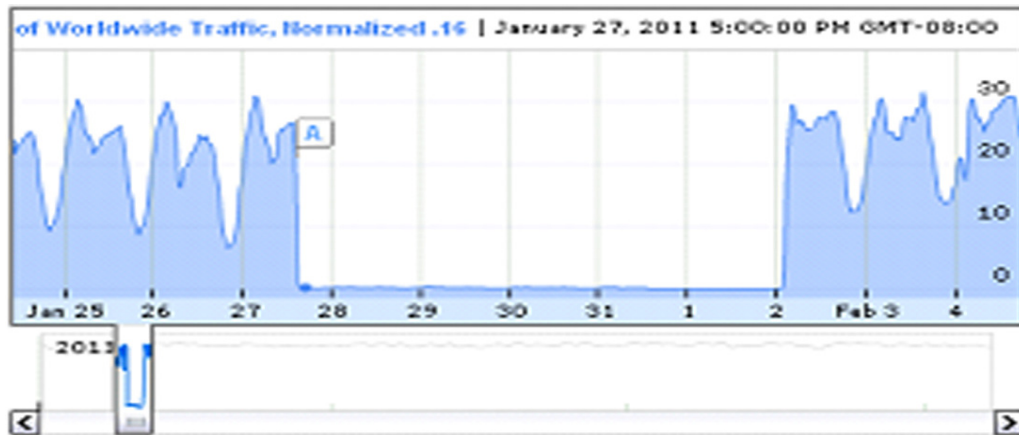
Historical Look at Revolutions in Egypt

1919 Revolution: In 1988, Egypt gained independence from Britain. It happened after three years of civil disobedience movement against British rule. Later the fight against colonialism was called "1919 Revolution."

In November 1918, Saad Zaghloul met with the British Ruler to negotiate Egypt's independence. He requested to attend the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. His request was rejected and he was arrested and exiled from Egypt. Following this incident, protests broke out in Egypt. Within a few days protests started in Cairo University and Al-Azhar University. After about a week, protests spread to other cities.

Revolution in January 2011

This revolution began on January 25, 2011 and led to resignation of Mubarak on February 11, 2011. The revolution's calendar is as follows: **June 6**, 2010: killing of Khaled Saeed by Egyptian police, **January 15**: the first sparks of public protests with demonstration of Egyptian citizens in front of Tunisian Embassy to support Tunisian Revolution, **January 17**: self-immolation of a young Egyptian named Abdeh Abdolmonam Hemadeh to protest over closing of his restaurant in front of Parliament building, **January 25**: The first mass protest arranged via social networks particularly Facebook, **January 26**: Violence by police and start of popular uprising in Suez, **January 27**: More protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, calling for protests on January 28 and government blocking Internet the same day at 5pm (figure 1, showing Internet traffic presented by Google on that day), **January 28**: Rage Friday in Egypt and imposing curfew from 6pm to 6am, **January 29**: presence of protesters in the streets despite the urfew and Internet being blocked for three consecutive days, **January 30**: Protests continuing in Egypt and calling for demonstration on February 1st, **January 31**: Google establishing three phone lines in the US, Italy and Bahrain for people to send their reports and recording their messages, **February 1**: protests of millions in Egypt, army's support, emphasis on people's legal rights and Mubarak's speech in the evening of January first and his emphasis on people's right to protest and criticize the government and also his announcement that he would not resign and he would not run for the following election, **February 2**: Disappearance of Wael Ghonim, Facebook activist, bloody attack by Mubarak supporters riding on camels and horses against protesters, Obama supporting transition of power in Egypt and appreciating Egyptian Army because of not using force on protesters and Mubarak's second speech and suspending Parliament's activities, **February 3**: More clashes between protesters and Mubarak's supporters, **February 4**: Farewell Day or Friday of Farewell and Amr Moussa joining the opposition, **February 6**: Official negotiations between protesters and government, **February 7**: Releasing Wael Ghonim, **February 8**: Love of Egypt Day and more protests, **February 9**: Over 20 thousand workers going on strike, **February 10**: Presence of more than 3000 lawyers of syndicate of lawyers and 1000 doctors in Cairo protests, Mubarak's televised speech and his refusal to step down, **February 11**: Omar Suleiman announcing Mubarak's resignation and army taking over the power.

Fig1. Internet traffic presented by Google (Internet blockage from January 27 to February 2)

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Position of Facebook in Egypt

In order to understand Facebook

S position in Egypt, first, communication tools in the country until December 2011 should be analyzed. Until December 2011, there were 65.5m cell phone lines, 9.5m telephone lines, 22.5m Internet users, 1.3m ADSL users, 8.5m mobile Internet users and 4600 Internet cafes.

Using Facebook in Egypt dates back to 2007. Its reputation is related to a political event which caused a successful mass strike on April 6, 2008. The number of Facebook users in May 2011 was 7.7 million which is 34 percent of all Internet users and 10 percent of the population. Figures 2 and 3 clearly show the trend of increase in using Facebook in Egypt in 2010 and 2011.

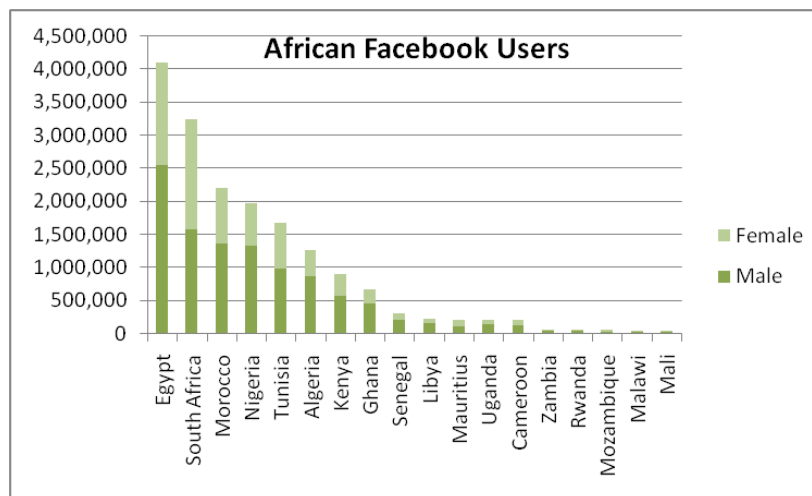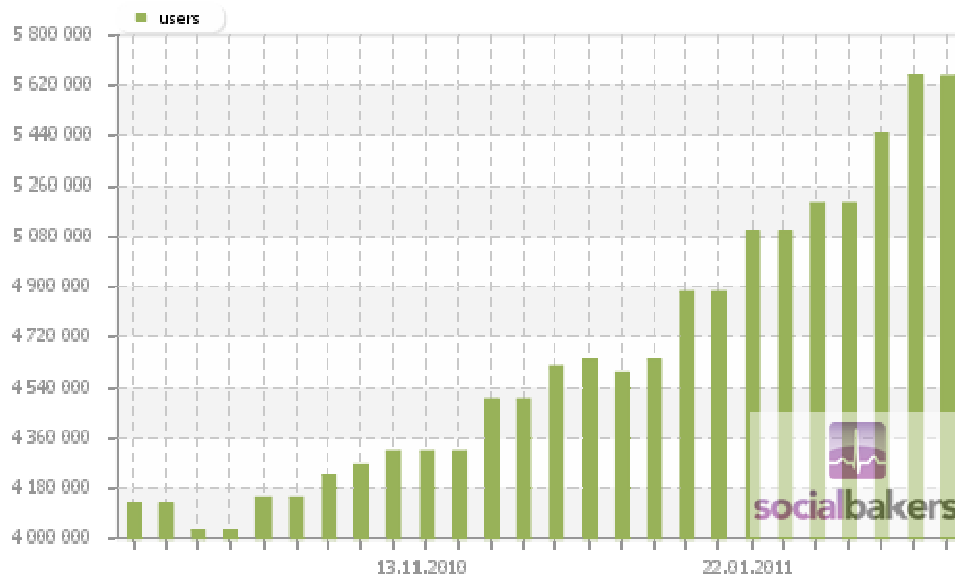Fig2. Number of Facebook users in African countries in October 2010

Fig3. Number of Facebook users in Egypt from September 2010 to February 2011

Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7 present categories of Facebook users respectively based on age, gender, marital status and language. According to the information below, 58 percent of Facebook users in Egypt are under 24 years old.

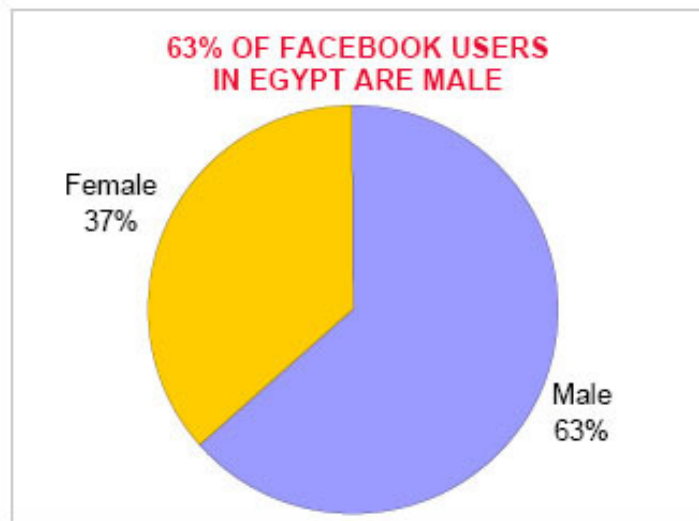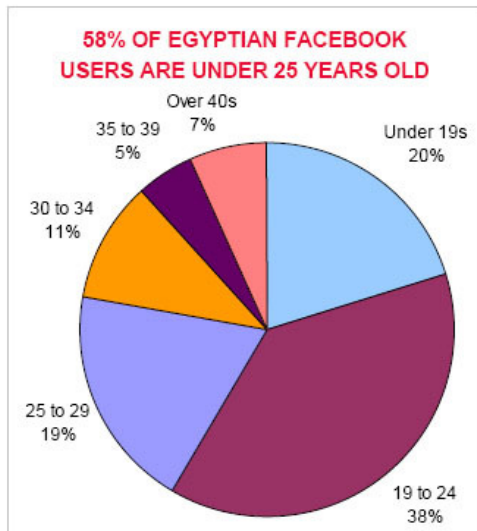Fig4. Number of Facebook users based on age   Fig5. Number of Facebook users based on gender

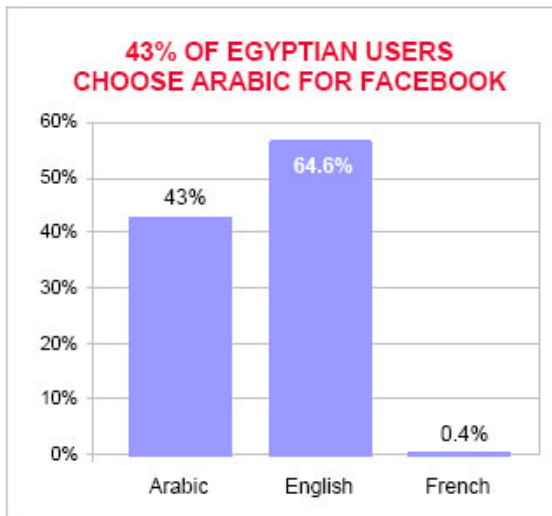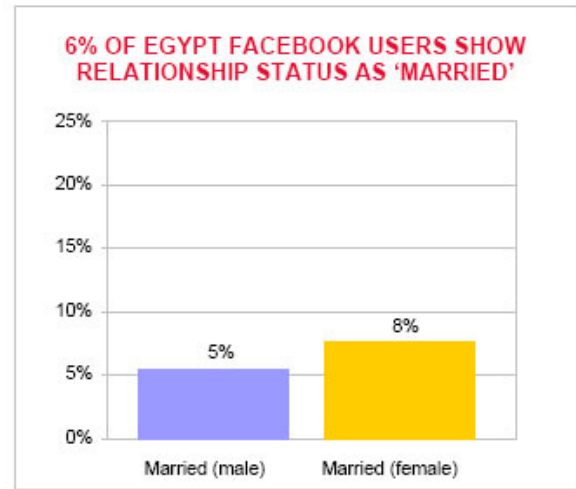アシエン ゾロナル オホ ソセアル サイネセズ アナド ヒウメニテズ

Fig6. Language used on Facebook

Fig7. Number of Facebook users based on marital status

Influential Facebook Pages in Egyptian Revolution

The Facebook Page "WE ARE ALL KHALED SAEED" was created in June 2010 which was named after a young Egyptian called Khaled Saeed who was killed by Egyptian police. Creating the page "WE ARE ALL KHALED SAEED" on Facebook from outside of geographical borders of Egypt, Wael Ghonim tried to manage the popular protests in Egypt. The Egyptian Revolution in January started from the aforementioned Facebook page. Before January 25, 2011, members of this page was about 400 thousand which reached 600 thousand on February 9 and 804 thousand on February 14, 2011. During the first 20 days after its creation, every day 20200 people joined the page.

On the page "WE ARE ALL KHALED SAEED", it was announced that, "We need international support to stand against police cruelty in Egypt. We invite you to support our movement."

Another effective page was April 6 Youth Movement. It was created on April 6, 2008 by Ahmad Maher and Israa Abdel Fattah to support workers of an industrial city called "Al-Mahallatolkobra". These workers wanted to go on strike to protest against rising prices and salary rules. They encouraged people to get dressed in black and stay at home.

This page attracted over 700 thousand members who were mainly young and educated. On April 6, Egyptian government was suddenly shocked since it witnessed one third of population stayed at home with a call through Facebook. And this was the first successful strike in Egypt. Ahmad Maher and Israa Abdel Fattah, online organizers of this strike, were imprisoned for a few weeks. April 6 Youth Movement did not develop political alliance with parties. Its members also organized some other demonstrations like the one for freeing imprisoned reporters or another one to support Gaza against Israel during their war.

Influential internet activists in Egypt's revolution

Khalid Saeed was one of the influential internet activists in Egypt's revolution (picture 8). A 28 year-old Egyptian who acted for organizing an opposing demonstration against Mubarak's regime. 2 policemen arrested him in a cybercafé in Eskandarie while he was disseminating a film in internet about the corruption of police forces in Egypt. The two policemen battered him severely which caused his death on the 6th of June 2010. The police reported that Saeed suffocated in an attempt to swallow a packet of hashish. This incident sparked the flames of Egypt revolution. Khalid Saeed became a symbol for thousands of Egyptians. Wael Ghonim created a Facebook memorial page for Saeed, called "We are all Khaled Said".

Ahmad Mahir, a 30year old civil engineer and one of the founders of the April 6 movement, was another influential internet activist. He and some young, educated Egyptian activists used Facebook, Twitter and Flickr to attract the support of the people from Egypt and all over the world. Demands of Ahmad Mahir and the youth movement were freedom of speech and Assembly, Eradication of poverty and government corruption. Peaceful campaign was their tactic and they attempted to use the experiences of peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe.

Wael Ghonim, a computer engineer and Head of Marketing of Google Middle East and North Africa was another internet activist who created a Facebook memorial page for Saeed, called "We are all Khaled Said". After calling for an assembling against Mubarak, he was detained on 27 January 2011 and released after 12 days. He topped Time magazine's yearly list of the world's 100 most influential people. He was one of the candidates of Nobel prize in 2011.

Asmaa Mahfouz, a 25year old Egyptian youth and one of the founders of the April 6 movement was another internet activist and the most influential Egyptian woman. She uploaded to YouTube a video on 18 January. In this video Asmaa called on Egyptians to gather in Altahrir square and riot against Hosni Mubarak. After the fall of Mubarak she uploaded another message in her Facebook and was arrested on charges of defaming the Egyptian military rulers. In her second message she wrote: If the Justice cannot guarantee and secure our rights, if the military rulers set a series of terrors, we shouldn't be surprised because there is no rule and justice.

 In 2011, she was one of five recipients of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

Deputy Manager of a high school published a notice in Alahram newspaper, the biggest daily Egyptian newspaper, asking President Hosni Mubarak and his wife to intercede and release their daughter. This is about a 27yearold girl called Esraa Abdel Fatah who was arrested in April 2008 on charges of calling on people to support the strike on April 6t Sanati El-Mahalla town. Esraa was one of the founders of the April 6 movement and is well-known as *Facebook Girl*. She was one of the candidates of Nobel prize in 2011.
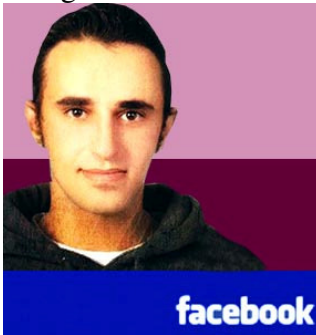
Fig8. Khaled Saeed

Fig9. Ahmad Maher

Fig10. Wael Ghonim

Fig11. Asmaa Mahfouz

Fig12. Israa Abdel Fattah

Role of Facebook in Egyptian Revolution in January

Three roles can be dedicated to Facebook in this revolution, which include calling for protests, managing participants' movements and gathering, and distributing news and information.

- Calling for protests: A day after the downfall of Tunisian Regime, calls for mass protests in Egypt started via Facebook and January 25 (legal holyday and National Police Day in Egypt) was chosen for this purpose. On this day, two Facebook pages – "WE ARE ALL KHALED SAEED" and "April 6 Youth Movement" – called for protests and an enormous crowd of protesters gathered in Cairo's Al-Tahrir Square.

- Twitter and Facebook had effective role in calling for and planning the protests. These two are considered important communication tools in Cairo and all Egyptian cities. Calling for protests again started. One of those calls was for protest on the Day of Rage, January 28, which was made by Facebook page " WE ARE ALL KHALED SAEED". On January 27, the Egyptian government realized the vital role of Twitter and Facebook and unpredictably cut off all communications in Egypt.

- Managing participants' movements and gathering: Protesters were divided into small groups who contacted each other via cell phone, Facebook or Twitter. Each small protest moved in narrow streets of Cairo's slums. Narrow streets protected protesters from police. Small protester groups moved toward crowded areas and finally to Al-Tahrir Square in which most state institutions and Parliament ware. During the protests, in each house, protesters wanted

to keep their wireless Internet connections open so Internet coverage remain while cell phone network was poor or dead.

- Distributing news and information: Since the first day of protest, many reporters, who had access to mobile Internet services, started to spread news, information, photos and videos of most events. One of these Facebook pages was Rassed News. Before being hacked, it had about 250 thousand members. After that, it created another page which currently has 150 thousand members. From January 25 to February 11, 2011, Rassed News distributed over 57 videos, 400 photos, 367 web links 10584 Twits. Another Facebook page was for Original Doston Newspaper which had a good coverage of protest news with its reporter and journalists and had about 110 thousand members.

- Facebook members had a fundamental role in distributing information during protest days. Members received information from various sources such as Facebook pages, news websites, TV channels and their own presence in the events. Egyptians' response to Facebook was unique and unprecedented. On Facebook pages, the number of comments ranged from 2500 to 20000, and minimum of likes in most Facebook news was 10000.

Viewpoints of some Figures on the Role of Media in Egyptian Revolution

- Wolf Blitzer from CNN: We share a video on Facebook and within a few hours it is shared by 50000 people on their pages. Media channels are vital and indispensable to liberation movements.

- Wael Ghonim: If you want to liberalize a society, just give them the Internet. If you provide an open and free Internet for a society with a lot of young people, and give most of them mobile phones, and deny them of any sign of economic or social change, you have set the stage for a global change.

- Walter Isaacson in Foreign Policy: Social Media can be bad phenomena only for tyrannical regimes, free circulation of information is democracy's oxygen and no one can deny the fact that Internet, mobile phones and social media are radically growing and accelerating this flow.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study is based on three hey questions, 1) Has the development of social media, such as Facebook, been effective in the success of this revolution? 2) Can this development lead to other changes or revolutions? 3) Is it true that information technology had an effective role in this revolution; Reuters calls it "Revolution caused by Facebook" and Hillary Clinton's chief advisor calls Internet "the 21st Century Che Guevara", to what extent, are these statements true?

Findings of the research show that social media such as Facebook along with other tools and factors had an effective role in the success of Egyptian Revolution. With three roles of calling for protests, managing participants' movements and gathering, and distributing news and information, Facebook and other social media had such an influential role in the revolution that it is considered a good example and model of Internet Revolution. This is in itself a dominant change in a culture arising from social networks. In response to the second question, considering the rate of modern communication tools development and their usage in sociopolitical changes of societies, and also Rand Foundation Research Center's prediction about the effect of technology in the Middle East and North Africa, we can say that thanks to these media we will witness other

changes and revolutions. As for the third question, we can give a positive answer because, in fact, Facebook had an effective and accelerating role in the revolution.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this research, it can be said that social media like Facebook had effective role in the Egyptian Revolution. Taking into account the developments in technology and modern communication tools and fulfillment of Rand's predictions, we can claim that developments of these media can lead to future changes and revolutions. On the other hand, we accept that Information technology had an enormous effect on the success of Egyptian Revolution, and what Reuters calls "Revolution caused by Facebook" is true. and that Hillary Clinton's chief advisor calls Internet "the 21st Century Che Guevara" is also true.

Referring to the theory of New Media, we can say: if we consider the features of Second Media Age, the effects of combining new communication technologies like satellite, computer, television, telephone etc, removal of exclusive contrast between producers and consumers of messages, and the fact that each medium carries a particular message and culture, we can claim that quick formation of social media and their effect, development of networked society, development and expansion of communication tools lead to changes and outcomes a good example of which is the Egyptian Revolution.

Finally, Egyptian Revolution teaches us how powerful people are, that they can defend their rights and freedom by any means and how technology helped human civilization. It did this not only through creating new tools and services but also by impressing existing cultures and lifestyles. Egyptian Revolution and the role of Internet and Facebook will never be forgotten and now it is a history.

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