The effect of the social network site Facebook on the Egyptian revolution 2011 / Shirley Shpiner

Abstract

"What brought Hosni Mubarak down was not Facebook and it was not Twitter. It was a million people in the streets, ready to die for what they believe in". (Friedman, 2011)

"If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet".

(Wael Ghonim as quoted by Hofheinz, 2011)

The origin of this thesis is based in the "Facebook revolution" and "Twitter revolution" labels that were given to the 2011 Egyptian uprisings, which led to ousting Mubarak. These labels fostered an extensive dialogue- the supporters of these labels emphasize the enormous importance the Internet and the social networks had in facilitating the revolution. According to the supporters of these labels, the Internet is the weapon of the week against the totalitarian leaders. Furthermore, the label "Facebook revolution" gives the uprisings a young and technological touch, and presents the young revolutionaries as those that take advantage of the technological gap created between them and the archaic leaders' generation. Yet, some are against these modern labels as they underestimate the value of the social networks' contribution to facilitating the revolution. For example, Rosen (2011) claims that it cannot be said that the social network was fully responsible for the Egyptian revolution and that the social communication is much more complicated and mysterious then the one that meets the eye. According to Gladwell (2011), nations had overthrown governments long before Facebook was founded and before the existence of the Internet and even the existence of phones. In this context, the "Spring of nations" (Revolutions of 1848/9), the French revolution and the blacks' protests in the United Stated can be mentioned since they all happened before the Internet and the social networks era.

The purpose of this thesis was to understand how much a social network can contribute to and facilitate a political-social protest by exposing the main features of a social network that can be recruited in favor of a successful political-social protest. This thesis tried to uncover the contribution of the social network Facebook and especially the contribution of the group **We are all Khaled Said** to the progression and expansion of the social protest in Egypt that led to ousting the Mubarak regime.

This thesis examined the main goals of the discussions that were conducted in the dates that were determined as the peak dates of the protests (according to a timeline that was mentioned) so it will be possible to understand and determine the contribution of the social networks in facilitating a successful online political protest.

The methodology that was chosen is a qualitative methodology that makes use in a case study and in the grounded theory principles. The analysis of the findings was an explanatory analysis in its essence, namely adding meanings to the content that will be extracted from the group. Using the grounded theory principles, it was possible to learn about life patterns and about organizational and social structures when the starting point is that patterns and repetitions exist in the human behavior but they cannot be described in a mathematical sense.

The gathering of the findings was conducted by analyzing content from the Facebook protest group that was chosen- **We are all Khaled Said** (http://www.facebook.com/elshaheeed.co.uk).

The research grasp was shaped with the data collection and by answering the research questions that pointed to the overall purpose of the research. The research questions dealt with the main subjects of the discussions in the peak dates that were chosen. In addition, the research examined which goals can be defined as the main goals of the discussions. Furthermore, the use of features as video and pictures in the online protest group was also examined.

Analysis of the findings indicates that although there are a variety of opinions regarding the part of Facebook in facilitating the Egyptian revolution, the social networks main roles in facilitating the protest were acting as an organizational tool, an expression of alternative press and finally in creating national and international awareness to the ongoing revolution. It is safe to say that the natural features of the social network and the Internet contributed to the basic demands for collective actions.

Nevertheless, in the light of the current political situation in Egypt, it can be said that the social network is not successful in transferring and translating the demands of the protestors into the everyday political reality.

At wide examination of the role of the social networks and their contribution to a successful social, political or economic protest, it can be said that the social networks' strength is expressed in several dimensions- recruiting and organizing the public, developing a sense of modernity and community among the users and attracting the international attention.

Yet, it is important not to overrate the contribution of the social networks to the success of social protests since although the new media enables the fulfillment of personal, social and political needs and wishes, and in spite of its availability and accessibility in the public sphere, it is not capable of giving rise to political change alone.

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