

# Cyber activism in the Middle East: Pre and Post of Arab Spring

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## ➔ Introduction

Cyber activism played a vital role to muzzle the conventional media in the Middle East and a number of the developing countries. According to the Eltantawy and Wiest (2011), by using the new media such as new communication of social media, the collective activities can be implemented, the collective identity among the marginalized group members can be promoted, political spaces is created and connections among other social movements is established. Antiwar, anti-globalization and global justice become the prominent of cyber activism. Furthermore, the new media is an additional resource for social movements implemented by the "resource poor" actors. It also interpreted the means of the constraints of financial, temporal or spatial among the mass communication. In the case of Egypt, the United Nations Development Programme's 2008 annual report, about 20% of the Egyptian population then lived below the

poverty line and it was becoming increasingly challenging for Egypt's poor to satisfy basic needs Eltantawy and Wiest (2011). These conditions gradually strengthen public frustration and irritation with the regime, which appeared to be enduring, as Hosni Mubarak was coaching his son Gamal to succeed him.

## ➔ The Impact Of Cyber Activism During Pre Arab Spring

Antiwar in Iraq became the starting point of the importance of the new media and connectivity. In 2003, the Internet was used by the activist in order to communicate, coordinate and create the awareness among decentralized networks. This results the global protest that brought together about 10 million demonstrated in hundreds cities. The revolution of Arabs in Egypt started in 2004, when the Egyptian authority Kareem Al Baheiri a labor rights activist and blogger was locked up but his news not listed as the headlines in the

conventional media. His cyber activism then becomes a part of growing protest and movement by using the new media (Khondker, 2011). The potentials of internet to bring up the revolutions are recognized. It is the vehicle for disseminate the democracy. In Egypt case, the internet has been used as a new tool to for democratic openness. It can shape the politics; open up a new public sphere especially in societies where a real public sphere is absent. In body of research, the potential of new media is discussed in two dimensions. The former is the potential of new media as a new tool of repression in the arsenal of the dictators. The latter is the potential of new media as a tool for democratic realism.

In June 2010, a young man from Alexandria named Said was approached by two police officers while patronizing an Internet café. It is reported that the officers demanded money from him. Because of his refusal to giving them the money, he was brutalized and dead on the street. Said's supporters believed that he was killed because of a video posted by him showing the two officers exchanging money after a drug deal. Said's face was flooded in the Internet websites. The killing of Said inspired a protest.

In previous research, it is argued that the development of new media during the Pre Arab Spring is because of resource mobilization. Since 1999, the government provides the free Internet access, low-cost computers and the expansion of Internet access centers. According to Internet marketing research firm Internet World Stats, in February 2010, more than 21% of Egypt's population of 80 million had access to the Internet, and more than 4.5 million used Facebook. Reported from Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, more than 70% of the population had a mobile

phone subscription.

Impact of this mobilization of resources through new media, there are figures who contributed to the revolution of Egypt. Among of them are; AlBaradei and Omar Afifi. ElBaradei was one of the pioneer activists who took advantage of the Internet to converse with his followers and circulate information. Afifi is a former Egyptian police officer who turned to activist. He wrote a book advising Egyptians on how to avoid police brutality. The book was banned and Afifi's life was threatened, which forced him to seek asylum in the United States. Afifi then took advantage of social media technologies in his continued effort to advise Egyptians, this time through YouTube videos, Facebook, and Twitter.

Furthermore, the social mobilization is also changed and become dynamic. The interactivity is introduced. For instance, the usage of leaflets, posters and faxes were become speedy in use, the events can be



organized domestically and internationally through social-networking groups.

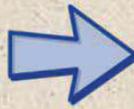
In addition, the major impact of Egyptian cyber activism is the exchanging and disseminating information to millions of people inside and outside of Egypt. The Tunisian inspired from the movements in Egypt while they also planning their own movement. Activist from both countries were exchanging information and ideas by online. An Egyptian activist woman named

Negm posted a video message from an Egyptian actress with words of encouragement for Tunisians.

In the case of Tunisia, Mohamed Bouzazi burned himself in Sidi Bouzid. The role of new media is recognized when his news of self-immolation in a small town was transmitted to the mass protest. Television networks such as Al Jazeera and Facebook both played a significant role in disseminating information and mobilizing the masses of protestors. Before the revolution, it is reported that the Facebook users in Tunisia in 2008 is only 28,000 from the population. The pioneer of Tunisian journalist and blogger was Zouhair Yahiaoui. He was the first online activist to be imprisoned (sentenced to two years of prison in 2001), and he died soon after he was released. Sami Ben Gharbia is a key figure in cyber activism not only in Tunisia (with the Nawaat blog), but also in the Arab world, through the blog Global Voices.

All of these cases showed the key role of new media to make the point of revolution. The Tunisian and Egyptians Facebook and Tweeter users named the protest as the revolution. The revolution is called Jasmine Revolution because it was not violent. From the discussion, there can be concluded that the arising of new media in Egypt and Tunisia is because of two reasons: the difficult socioeconomic conditions such as unemployment, the high costs of living, inequalities among classes, censorship and so forth were at the root of people's humiliation and frustration. Deplorable economic conditions, political deprivations, corruption, and social repressions are ubiquitous among most Arab countries and represent the motivating factors for these revolutionary actions. The second reason, as important as the first, is the flow of

networks to which people belong: networks of friends, family, work, school, and others of interest (such as the media) (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011). The impacts of the mobilization of new media is the revolution of the collective societies in both countries.



### *The Role Of New Media As Part of Cyber Activism During The Arab Spring*

The new media during the Arab Spring plays three major roles; shaping the political debates, a spike in online revolutionary conversation often preceded major events on the ground and helped spread democratic ideas across international borders (Howard et al., 2011).



### *The Impact of New Media As Part of Cyber Activism: Post Of Arab Spring*

In Tunisia, since Ben Ali's dismissal on January 14, 2011, the interim government has been the target of antigovernment demonstrations demanding a replacement of ministers affiliated with the now-dissolved old regime's party. On February 27, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi—a relic from Ben Ali's regime—stepped down and was replaced by Béji Caïd Essebsi, an elder statesman from founding President Habib Bourguiba's era. Other ministers have followed suit. Most recently, a prominent figure of the revolution, Slim Amamou, blogger-turned-Secretary of State for Sport and Youth, resigned the week of May 25 to protest the return of censorship of websites under the interim government. Furthermore, the popular mobilization is still simmering. Calls to continue the revolution and cleanse both countries of the figures and symbols of the old regime were ongoing in that time (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011).

After the Arab Spring, it can be said that the new media has impacted the five levels of society. The first level is the formation individual's attitudes, competency and behavior. Users of new media might think or behave differently from those who not exposed to the information. The rise of activist identity across the region offer fairly strong support for this proposition. Activist across the region from Tunisia and Egypt seemed to demonstrate remarkably similar attributes. Most of the activists were young, well-educated and urban. They were drawn to street protest and special forms of political action that were not totally distributed through other sectors of society. The intellectual and the way of thinking is also different compared to the other part of Egyptian youth society.

The second level is the formation of political and social polarization. The new media gave the impact on the interconnection among the society domestically and internationally. The third level is the impact on collective action among the organizations and promotions. The fourth level is the impact on regime. The fifth level is the impact on the international attention when the new media influencing the international. These five level of analysis has been discussed by Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, and Freelon (2012).

### *The Online Political Participation in Body of Knowledge*

According to the literature reviewed, there is a wide consensus thought that political participation is among the cornerstones of a well functioning democracy. The Western society started to decline the traditional form of political participation which is based on parliamentary realm. The transformation of political participation is done

by the young citizens when the traditional participation is replaced to lifestyle politics, political consumerism, internet activism etc. According to a research, online political engagement is measured. The Facebook participation particularly make a unique contribution to the political participation (Vissers & Stolle, 2013).

### *Conclusion*

The communication technologies can empower the citizens. The political participation recently has been changed and transformed by the young into the online mediums. The new media is become the imperative medium to the the Arab citizen in expressing their political thoughts. The study of new media usage in pre, during and post Arab Spring give us a lesson about the influence of political participation transformation. Traditional political participation in Arab countries especially Egypt and Tunisia remained declined when the democracy is unfairly practiced by the authorities.

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