



SCIREA Journal of Sociology

<http://www.scirea.org/journal/Sociology>

May 23, 2023

Volume 7, Issue 3, June 2023

<https://doi.org/10.54647/sociology841062>

Recruiting Technology and Social Media: The Digital Social Media in Service of Arab Youth during the 'Arab Spring'

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Abstract

In recent decades, social movements around the world have worked to advance social and political causes, including struggles against tyranny, governmental corruption, police brutality, struggles for changing gender norms, reduce economic inequality and increase awareness of the climate crisis. Digital tools have helped young activists give voice to their political activities by helping articulate a given action's goals, recruiting participants, and increasing public support. **This article analyzes young Arab people's role in the Arab Spring**

through their extensive use of social media. The core question of this article is whether and how Arab youth used social media to influence the spread of the Arab Spring and contribute to its success. The article's main argument is that the Arab Spring is an important example of young people's successful use of digital tools to amplify social and political activity, including actions that eventually led to the fall of Arab dictatorships.

Keywords: Arab spring, Social media, Digital tools, Arab youth, recruiting digital media.

The Internet and social media allow for connection between users who have something in common, without actually knowing one another. The Internet is both immediate and virtual and thus allows for mass meetings between people, including via Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and more. These platforms allows users to express themselves in diverse ways and can be tools for creating social and political change. They can be arenas for expressing dissent, publicizing content that opposes the regime's activities, encouraging users to participate in protests, and also can provide a platform for marginalized voices in society.

In recent decades, social movements in Israel and around the world have focused on diverse social campaigns, including the struggle against corruption and police violence, the fight for changing gender norms, and work to reduce economic inequality and increase awareness of the climate crisis. Among the central social movements that have arisen in the last years are Black Lives Matter, MeToo, and, of course, the Arab Spring. Social movement activists have used social media and other digital platforms, such as cellular maps and crowdfunding and petition websites. Digital tools, such as hashtags, memes, images, and video clips, have helped activists to articulate their goals, recruit participants, crowdfund, and garner public support. Digital activity has allowed activists to reach diverse and decentralized audiences, bridge cultural gaps, and help activists reach new audiences around the world in order to grow and globalize their circles of support.¹

The digital social media revolution did not go unnoticed in the Arab world. Young Arabs used social media, especially in urban areas, to organize protests and to disseminate political

¹ O. Keynan, "*Activism U'Macha'a be-idan ha-digitali: Hizdamnut, etgarim, kelim, ve-darchoi peulah*" [Activism and Protest in the Digital Era: Opportunity, Challenges, Tools, and Ways to Act], *Shatil* (2021), p. 5.

messages quickly and effectively.² The uprisings of the Arab Spring, especially in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, marked an intergenerational, anti-patriarchal drama. The roots of this social protest movement can be traced back to the expansion of higher education in the 19th century, followed by youth revolutions in Syria, Turkey, and Egypt in the 20th century, which brought about new values and a national, militant spirit while directly influencing new revolutionary directions in the 1950s and 1960s. This led to the significant rise in the number of both male and female students in the 21st century, along with the dramatic demographic increase in the number of young people in Arab society. Young, educated Arabs faced significant challenges, including unemployment, a housing crisis, lack of free speech, corruption within the governmental system, gender discrimination, and more. At the same time, a global media revolution was unfolding. The Internet and “blogosphere” revolution reinforced a universal aspiration for freedom and organized protest movements. This digital revolution allowed for connections that had been impossible in the past -- between students and frustrated post-graduates, high school students and young workers, secular people and religious people, men and women, and parents and their children.³

The new world of technology has allowed young Arabs to express their feelings through new media with a goal of social change: This is “no longer a ‘generation in waiting,’ living in an emotive community of fear, submission, and passivity, but rather a generation that is capable of actualizing itself and building an emotive community based on respect, independence, freedom, and solidarity.”⁴ In addition, new media has enabled content to spread like wildfire within Arab countries and motivated users to take part in actions not only on the Internet but also on the ground, including those that entailed taking on serious personal risks.⁵ The main events on the ground were preceded by online conversations that began with the self-immolation of the Tunisian vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in front of the municipality building in Tunisia in protest of the regime’s behavior in December 2010, and these conversations then

² N. Al Sayyad and M. Guvenc, "Virtual Uprisings: On the Interaction of New Social Media, Traditional Media Coverage and Urban Space during the ‘Arab Spring’", *Urban Studies* (52:11, 2015).

³ H. Erlich, *Dorot shel meri: Studentim ve-universitaot be-mizrah ha-tichon* [Generations of Rage: University and Students in the Middle East] (Ra'anana: The Open University Press, 2012), p. 16.

⁴ R. Marzan, *Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecta: ha-tzeirim ve-ha-tzeirot be-aviv ha-aravi* [The Father, the Son and the Spirit of the Revolution: The Young Arabs in the Arab Spring] (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2021).

⁵ S. Davidson, ‘An Exploratory Study of Risk and Social Media: What Role Did Social Media Play in the Arab Spring Revolutions?’, *Journal of Middle East Media* 11 (2015), p. 12

spread to other Arab countries. In parallel, social media helped spread democratic ideas across borders. The Tunisian and Egyptian governments fell, a civil war broke out in Libya, and protestors took to the streets in Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Yemen, and other places. Muhamad Bouazizi's story was one of many stories that was told on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and it influenced people in different countries to organize protests, criticize the government, and spread democratic ideas, alongside establishing political sites.⁶ News from social media also influenced the work of standard media bodies, which began to rely upon social media "reports," which came from the field, while traditional media provided a meta-story surveying the stories of people on social media.⁷

This article will briefly describe the Arab Spring and the context of its outbreak and will examine the role of social media during social revolutions, the rise of social media's power, and the role young people played in the Arab Spring through the use of social media. The article will rely on professional literature, especially primary sources from the time of the Arab Spring, including newspapers (primarily from Arabic and Hebrew newspapers) and content that was uploaded to social media during the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring: General Background

On September 1, 2010, residents of Tripoli, Libya, woke up to celebrations of Muammar Gaddafi's "Revolution Day." A month later, Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party won 83% of seats in the Egyptian Parliament, a victory clouded by cases of violence, arrests, and accusations of fraud. In October, elections took place in Bahrain, in which the opposition party Al Wefaq won half of the seats in the lower house, despite accusations of civil rights violations and the closure of newspapers and websites in the months preceding the elections. A year earlier, the president of Tunisia, Zine Ben Ali, secured his fifth term in office, receiving 89% of votes. Over 1,000 public figures signed a petition encouraging the aging president to run in the 2014 elections, despite the fact that Tunisian law prohibits having a president over the age of 75. In Yemen, parliamentary elections, which were supposed to take place in 2009, were delayed for two years because of disagreements about political reforms.

⁶ P.N. Howard, A. Duffy, D. Freelon, M.M. Hussain, W. Mari, and M. Maziad, '*Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?*', SSRN (2019).

⁷ A. Russell, '*Extra-National Information Flows, Social Media and the 2011 Egyptian Uprising*', *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011), p. 1238.

And in Syria, Bashar Al-Assad was in the middle of his second seven-year term in office, after succeeding his late father after the constitution was changed so that he would be able to hold office despite his young age of 34.⁸

This was a stormy decade in the Arab world. Food prices increased in 2010 and protests began with demands to reduce the price of bread and other products and to raise wages. This was true both in more populated countries and in the Gulf Emirates and led to a sharp reduction in household spending and to broader demands for government subsidies.⁹ Gas prices were also very high, which, though it benefitted oil exporters, was a serious problem for poorer countries such as Tunisia and Morocco. 61% of the population was under the age of 30, and unemployment among young people expanded tremendously.¹⁰ In addition, economic growth, which had been fed by foreign investments, including by the Gulf states, and a liberal economic policy that allowed the rich, some of whom were family members of those in power, to join up with foreign investments in order to start joint companies did not trickle down to the masses but rather remained within the domain of big corporations and the wealthy.¹¹

The continued rule of tyrannical leaders in Arab states began to garner criticism. But despite the fact that television and the Internet created new public spaces in the Arab world and helped aid the possibility of challenging tyrannical rule, freer expression did not translate into political change. Increasing tension developed between aging rulers and the restless young people whom they ruled. Lacking resources, members of what was called “the generation in waiting” could often not afford to marry and, in places where elections had been done away with or where election fraud was rampant, could also not express their dissatisfaction in the ballot box.

Journalists and intellectuals protested the decay of cultural and political life. These feelings aligned with a report written by Arab academics and published by the UN in 2002 on human development in Arab countries. According to the report, besides the importance of the war on poverty and raising life expectancy, three central factors threatened to push the region years

⁸ L. Noueihed and A. Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era* New Haven: *Yale University Press*, (2012).

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 24

¹⁰ The World Bank, “*UN population statistics for Middle East and North Africa in 2010*,” 2022 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ZQ>

¹¹ Noueihed & Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring*, p. 26-7

backwards: lack of civil liberties, unequal rights for women, and low levels of education.¹² According to the report, levels of education in the Arab world were lower even than developing countries, and Arab states invested less in research than most areas of the world.¹³ The growing lack of confidence of both Arab citizens in their governments and also of the broader world in Arab progress increased after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, and the United States' invasion into Iraq began long years of civil war and unprecedented hostility between Sunni and Shia. In short, it was not easy to be an Arab during this time. As Ted Gurr wrote in his book, *Why Men Rebel*, the gap between what citizens have and what they feel they deserve forms the basis for the outbreak of great revolutions.¹⁴ The day before Ben Ali fled Tunisia, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned the United States' Arab allies not to postpone reforms indefinitely. "In too many places in too many ways the region's foundations are sinking into the sand," Clinton said. "Those who cling to the status quo may be able to hold back the full impact of their countries' problems for a little while, but not forever."¹⁵

Thus, the Arab Spring was far from being a sudden awakening, and it spanned a decade of protest and political activity that laid the foundation for more open political systems. In the five years preceding the uprisings, the movements against the rise in the cost of living, unemployment, corruption, and governmental stagnation gained moment in Tunisia and Egypt. Strikes posed a serious challenge for governments trying to bring about the economic growth necessary for creating work and calming angry, unemployed young people. In Yemen, power struggles threatened the country's stability, and a decade of political reforms in Bahrain ended in failure and pushed protesters back to the streets. In Syria, years of drought led to riots in rural areas that spread to the cities. However, the stability of these states seemed guaranteed, and their leaders seemed invincible, especially given that leaders of the opposition, mainly from the left and Islamists, were exiled or imprisoned. The inability to participate politically in a meaningful way led many to find refuge in religion or small social circles. However, these accumulating tensions began to exert increasing social and political pressure. From Lebanon to Iraq to Algeria, Arab attempts at true democracy ended in violence that took the

¹² "Arab Human Development Report 2009," www.arab-hdr.org, (21.11.2015),pp. 27-9.

¹³ Ibid. p. 52

¹⁴ T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton: *Princeton University Press*, (1970), p. 32.

¹⁵ A. Quinn and R.E. Doherty, "*Clinton Talks Tough to 'Stagnant' Mideast Allies*", Reuters, (January 13, 2011). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-arabs/clinton-talks-tough-to-stagnant-mideast-allies-idUSTRE70C1YA20110113>.

lives of many. The frustrated millions were preparing for a protest that, in 2011, would endanger their lives.¹⁶

In January 2011, the Tunisian president was forced into exile following protests that spread from rural areas to the capital. A month later, protests that broke out in Egypt and drew hundreds of thousands of protestors to Tahrir Square in Cairo led to the resignation of the president. At the end of the summer, Libyan military forces, backed by NATO air forces, conquered Tripoli and assassinated Gaddafi. And in Yemen – after ten months of pressure from home and abroad, the president signed an agreement to transfer his power in exchange for his release. A new order was established in which the old certainties were questioned, and the impossible suddenly seemed possible: during the revolutionary storm of January-February 2011, the masses took to the streets in Cairo, Tunis, Benghazi, Casablanca, and Amman, and it seemed that every Arab regime was under threat.¹⁷

The First Spark: The “Jasmine” and “Lotus” Revolutions

The Jasmine Revolution, as it was nicknamed, was an uprising that began a wave of protests in the Arab world and ultimately led to the Arab Spring. It began in Tunisia on December 18, 2010 as part of youth and student street protests against continued price hikes. The catalyst for the protests was the death of a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire and died of his injuries after authorities evicted his fruit and vegetable stand because he was working illegally. A short time later, another young person who could not find work died by suicide. The protests that these events ignited spread to different cities, and as the police’s attempts at repression grew, the protests grew stronger, expressing mass opposition to the president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, whose corrupt and dictatorial regime had been in place for 23 consecutive years. In response, Ben Ali fled the country on January 14, 2011 and was removed from office. The protests led to the deaths of some 220 people.¹⁸

The uprising in Tunisia quickly caught on in Egypt, where people took to the streets on January 25, 2011 to protest the corrupt and oppressive regime of Mubarak. One reason protests spread to Egypt was the case of Khaled Mohamed Saeed, who became a symbol of

¹⁶ Noueihed and Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring*, 2012. pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 5-6

¹⁸ "Tunisia Protests Against Ben Ali Left 200 Dead, Says UN," BBC News, (January 1, 2011), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12335692>.

the struggle against Mubarak's regime. Saeed was a blogger who was critical of the regime and who died at the age of 28 after he was arrested by Egyptian police in June 2010 in an Internet café in Alexandria. Horrific photographs of his mutilated body, after he was reportedly beaten by the police, were circulated online. Shortly thereafter, an Internet campaign began by the name of "We Are all Khaled Saeed." On the Facebook page of the campaign, people criticized the regime and called for public protests. Saeed's story circulated online and pointed to the abusive behavior of the Egyptian regime and President Mubarak's unrestrained power.¹⁹

A "day of rage" turned into many, intense days of protests, which concentrated in Tahrir Square in Cairo under the slogan "bread, freedom, and social justice." Protests also took place in Alexandria, Ismailia, Aswan, Mansoura, and Asyut. The government's decision to block access to Facebook and Twitter, which protestors had been using as their main means of mobilizing the masses and organizing protests, led to the protests' intensification, and masses set the ruling party's building on fire. After the Muslim Brotherhood joined the protestors and the leader of the opposition and Nobel Peace Prize winner Mohamed ElBaradei announced that he would return to Egypt to replace Mubarak, the government forbade gathering for Friday prayers and implemented a nighttime curfew. Mubarak then announced that he would implement democratic and economic reforms and replace ministers in his government, but protestors continued to call for his resignation. Leaders of the west and the Secretary-General of the United Nations called for respecting civil rights, especially freedom of expression and information, and, following the killing of protestors, Barack Obama and Angela Merkel called for Mubarak's immediate resignation.²⁰ On January 30, the defection of police officers to the side of the protestors and the weakening of the police led to the paralysis of the prison system, and thousands of prisoners escaped. Mubarak decided to block the TV channel Al Jazeera in Egypt, arguing that it was inciting against him.²¹

Due to the continued protests and continued weakening of the police force, on February 1st, Mubarak announced that he would finish his term as president in September and that he

¹⁹ O. Keynan, *Activism U'Macha'a be-idan ha-digitali*, 2021, p. 21.

²⁰ Y. Ben-Horin, "Obama lo marpeh me-Mubarak: hatchel haavarat ha-shilton [Obama is not relaxing on Mubarak: start the transfer of power]," *Calcalist*, (February 5, 2011). <https://www.calcalist.co.il/world/articles/0,7340,L-3507158,00.html>.

²¹ E. Lehmann, "Mahapechat Al-jazeera ha-rishona: ha-milchama al ha-shalat", [The first Al Jazeera Revolution: The War for the Remote Control," *Ynet*, (January 31, 2011) ,<https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4021432,00.html>.

would not run in the next elections – an announcement that did not satisfy the protesting masses, who continued to call for his immediate resignation. Mubarak appointed his vice president Omar Suleiman to carry out negotiations with the opposition. However, following damage to a pipe carrying natural gas from Egypt to Jordan and Syria and the cessation of Egypt's supply of gas to Israel, senior members of the ruling party resigned, including Mubarak's son Gamal.²² On February 6th, leaders of the opposition began negotiations with Suleiman, during which they agreed to establish a committee to change the constitution.²³ However, these agreements did not satisfy the protestors, and a growing lack of trust led to the Vice President's February 11th announcement that Mubarak would resign and power would be transferred to the military, led by Minister of Defense Tantawi.²⁴ The protests continued into March and April, and after Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq resigned in April, Mubarak was arrested at his home in Sinai. His wife, two sons, and ministers of the previous government were also placed under arrest on suspicion of acts of corruption and violent repression of protestors. The Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of the ruling party and appointed a committee to investigate responsibility for the death of almost one thousand people during the preceding events. On August 3rd, the trial began for Mubarak, his sons, the former Interior Minister, and police officers accused of governmental corruption and of shooting unarmed protestors.²⁵ On November 18th, about a week before parliamentary elections, riots began again, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, who argued that the military leadership was not advancing democracy, leading to the resignation of the government.²⁶ On June 2, 2012, the Supreme Court in Cairo ruled that Mubarak and his Interior Minister would receive life imprisonment for their involvement in the repression of protests.²⁷

²² R. Nachmias, "*Mitkaplim: Bechirei Miflegat Ha-shilton ve-Gamal hipatru* [Packing Up: Leaders of the Ruling Party and Gamal Resign]," Ynet, (February 5, 2011), <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4024205,00.html>.

²³ "*Mitsrayim: Veada Tifal Leshanot et ha-Chukah* [Egypt: A Committee Will Work to Change the Constitution]," NRG, (February 6, 2011), <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART2/208/978.html>.

²⁴ A. Issacharof, "*Nasi Mitzrayim Hosni Mubarak Hitpater mi-Tafkido* [The President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak Resigned from His Position]," Haaretz, (February 11, 2011), <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/world/1.1161728>.

²⁵ N. Yahav, "*Historia be-Mitzrayim: Niftach Mishpato Shel Hosni Mubarak* [History in Egypt: Hosni Mubarak's Trial has Started]," Walla, (August 3, 2011), <https://news.walla.co.il/item/1846857>.

²⁶ N. Yahav, "*Mitzrayim: Ha-Memshala Higisha Hitpatruta Ekev Chidush ha-Mehumot* [Egypt: The Government Submitted Its Resignation Following the Renewal of Protests]," Walla, (February 21, 2011), <https://news.walla.co.il/break/1878969>.

²⁷ N. Yahav, "*Maasar Olam le-Nasi Mitzrayim Hudach Hosni Mubarak* [Life Imprisonment for Ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak]," Walla, (June 2, 2012), <https://news.walla.co.il/item/2538171>.

Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was elected president in the first free elections for the Egyptian presidency, which took place in May-June 2012.²⁸ Morsi was later removed by the army following protests by millions of people against his rule, including his decisions to fire the attorney general, his move to assume extensive authority at the expense of the judiciary system, and his role in the continued economic downturn. Morsi attempted to hold a referendum with the goal of approving a new constitution, which led to a coup headed by Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.²⁹ In January 2014, after riots and the murder of Morsi's supporters, a new constitution was approved via referendum, and Morsi's trial began. On June 8th, el-Sisi was sworn in as president. The Egyptian revolution earned the nickname "the Youth Revolution" and the "Lotus Revolution."³⁰

Inspired by the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, a wave of protests and violent demonstrations swept through most Arab countries: in Libya, a wave of protests broke out on February 15, 2011;³¹ in Syria, protests against the regime of President Assad began in March 2011 in the southern city of Daraa;³² on February 2, 2011, the president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, announced that he would not run in elections planned for 2013 and would not pass on his position to his son. Protests against the cost of living, governmental corruption, and violations of individual freedoms also took place in Algeria, beginning on the 25th of December; in Jordan beginning in March;³³ in Morocco beginning on February 20th;³⁴ and in Bahrain

²⁸ Z. Meriboute, "'Arab Spring': The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and Their Vision of Islamic Finance and State," *Journal of International Development Policy* (4: 2013).

²⁹ R. Kais and E. Levy, "*Haficha Shniya: Tzava Mitzrayim Hidiach et Mohamed Morsi* [A Second Coup: the Egyptian Army Ousted Mohamed Morsi]," *Ynet*, (July 4, 2013), <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4400507,00.html>.

³⁰ "Egyptian-American leaders call for U.S. support of 'Lotus Revolution,'" *CNN*, (January 28, 2011), https://web.archive.org/web/20110314141657/http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-28/world/egypt.press.club_1_saad-eddin-ibrahim-egyptian-american-egyptian-people?_s=PM%3AWORLD.

³¹ D. Zisenwine, "*Zakat ha-Aviv- ha-Aravi be-Lov: Ha-milchama al ha-Shilton, ha-Zehut, ve-ha-seder ha-medinati* [The Cry of the Arab Spring in Libya: The War for Power, Identity, and the Political Order]," in E. Podeh and O. Winckler (ed.), *Ha-Gal Ha-Shelishi: Mechaa ve-Mahapecha be-Mizrach ha-Tichon* [*The Third Wave: Protest and Revolution in the Middle East*], Jerusalem: Carmel, (2017).

³² F. Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion*, Stanford: *Hoover Institution Press*, (2012).

³³ R. Kadri and E. Bronner, "*King of Jordan dismisses his cabinet*," *The New York Times*, (February 1, 2011), <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/02/world/middleeast/02jordan.html>.

³⁴ "*Ha-im ha-Reformat be-Morocco Yatzilu et ha-Melech mi-Zaam ha-Hamon?* [Will Reforms in Morocco Save the King from the Anger of the Masses?]," *Walla*, (July 7, 2011), <https://news.walla.co.il/item/1836979>.

beginning on September 14th.³⁵ In some places, protests led to severe repression, arrests, and biased trials that led to years-long prison sentences.³⁶ Similar protests, albeit on a smaller scale, also took place in Lebanon, Oman, Djibouti, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Kuwait, Sudan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the Palestinian Authority.³⁷

Young People's and Social Media in the Arab Spring

Against the backdrop of growing socio-economic unrest, the Internet connected students and educated individuals to other strata in Arab society, such as workers and professional organizations and to oppositional political bodies. Through Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, Arab young people shared their hardships, aspirations, and anger about governmental corruption with one another, all while avoiding censorship.³⁸ Blogs that began in Egypt and Tunisia reported on strikes and protests of workers, fishermen, train conductors, judges, pharmacists, students, and villagers who suffered from poor living conditions and outrageous injustices.³⁹

Tunisian and Egyptian activists gradually increased their use of the Internet. Bloggers slowly created islands of civil society through virtual networks and encouraged others to join.⁴⁰ These blogs were an important source of information for activists, who took photographs and videos from these blogs that documented the regime's oppressiveness and shared them on their Facebook pages. The security forces took brutal repressive measures against bloggers and young Internet activists, a fact that attested to their potential for influence and the fear they instilled in the regime.⁴¹ This repression only increased the young people's unrest. This unrest reached a peak moment following elections for Egyptian parliament in November 2010. In 2008, a Facebook group began by the name of "April 6, 2008," the date on which textile

³⁵ "Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry," 2011, <https://www.bici.org.bh>.

³⁶ "UAE: Nearly a Decade of Unjust Imprisonment for 'UAE-94' Dissidents," Amnesty International, (July 2, 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/uae-nearly-a-decade-of-unjust-imprisonment-for-uae-94-dissidents/>.

³⁷ A. Cohen, "Mahapechat ha-Facebook: ha-Girsa ha-Falastinit [The Facebook Revolution: Palestinian Edition]," NRG, (February 9, 2011), <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART2/209/986.html>.

³⁸ Marzen, *Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha*, 2021, p. 89.

³⁹ W. Perlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria*, New York: HarperCollins, (2017), p. 22.

⁴⁰ Wael Ghonim, *Al thawrah 2.0 [The Revolution 2.0]*, Cairo, *Dar al-shorouk*, (2012), p.13.

⁴¹ Perlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, 2017. P. 15.

workers from Cairo began protests against their employers and the government. Within two years, it had grown to 80,000 followers and had brought together different groups in an attempt to initiate democratic reforms in the state, including free elections.⁴² Ahmed Maher, a member of April 6th, was kidnapped and beaten by Egyptian security services, and the story of his kidnapping and torture spread on social media. More and more bloggers from Tunisia and Egypt were arrested and tortured.⁴³

In January 2011, a student named Wael Ghonim posted a call to the group named after Khaled Saeed, the university student who was beaten to death for posting critical comments about Mubarak on Facebook, to hold a demonstration.⁴⁴ Masses gathered in Cairo in what was nicknamed “Black Saturday.” Social media was awash with calls to join the protests. In early January 2011, many still thought that social media was politically meaningless for organizing purposes.⁴⁵ It was necessary to integrate new social media and physical social networks in universities, workplaces, mosques, professional unions, and homes,⁴⁶ as well as with independent and influential media channels such as Al Jazeera.⁴⁷

Social problems became the fuel that ignited the fire, and social media was the wind that spread it.⁴⁸ Research investigating the connection between social media and the outbreak of Arab uprisings in 2011 found that during the weeks preceding the outbreak of uprisings, activity on social media in twenty Arab and Muslim countries was limited; there was a rise in numbers of users only after the outbreak of an uprising. Social media played more of a role of reporting on uprisings and spreading information about them than as an organizing tool on its own.⁴⁹ In the first three months of 2011, there was a 30% increase in the use of social media among young people in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria.⁵⁰ During the first six days

⁴² 'Khams sanawat 'ala wiladat 'harakat 6 april' zid nizam mubarak', [5 years since the birth of the 'April 6 protest' against Mubarak's regime] , Al-misri al-yawm, (5.4.2013).

<https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/300957>

⁴³ Hisham Matar, *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between*, London: *Penguin Books*, (2017).

⁴⁴ S. Perry, “*Melech ha-Kikar* [King of the Square],” *Yediot Ahronot*, (February 18, 2011).

⁴⁵ H. Erlich, *Dorot shel Meri*, 2012, p. 261.

⁴⁶ Perlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, 2017. P. 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.21.

⁴⁸ Marzen, *Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha*, 2020. P. 91.

⁴⁹ Perlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, 2017. P. 88.

⁵⁰ M. Albakry and R. Maggor (editors), *Tahrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution*, London: *Segaull Books*, (2016), pp. 326-7.

of the first uprising in Egypt, the Internet and cellular service went down, causing many people to go out to the streets in order to meet up with their friends.⁵¹ In Libya, where the Internet was disconnected for six months, protestors continued using cellular devices and satellite channels in order to disseminate videos they were sent from other countries. Computer engineers and amateur hackers helped spread these reports in both cities and rural areas.⁵²

The combination of satellite channels, social media, and protest tents and demonstrations in urban areas created a new model for civil protests, which combined virtual and physical geographic spaces. This was the model that young people exported to other audiences in the same country, to neighboring countries, and to the broader world.⁵³ For young people, the rich flow of information in real time highlighted the gap between ideals of human rights, freedom, and equality and the difficult reality of their lives. Exposure to more information increased the anger and shame young people felt about their oppression, intensifying their desire to affect change.⁵⁴

Qatar's Al Jazeera satellite channel, which was available in 70% of Arab homes across the Middle East, and its website became part of the information revolution and played a central role in Qatar's foreign policy, as well as in the changing consciousness of young people in Arab countries.⁵⁵ Unlike the Internet, it was hard to block satellite broadcasts. Al Jazeera provided an interpretive framework for problems in the Arab world, pointed a finger to those responsible, and spurred citizens to act. Young Arabs saw the channel as a bold source documenting reality.⁵⁶ It gave a voice to marginalized communities and allowed them to partake in public conversations on topics that until then had been taboo in the patriarchal Arab

⁵¹ K. Kneissel, "Elements for Scientific Analysis of the Arab Revolution in Spring 2011", *Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences*, (March 2, 2011). pp. 5-8.

⁵² N. Neggaz, "Syria Arab Spring: Language Enrichment in the Midst of Revolution", *Language, Discourse and Society Journal* (2013): pp. 12-17, 20-22.

⁵³ Perlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, 2017. P. 84.

⁵⁴ D. Abudi, *Mothers and Daughters in Arab Women's Literature: The Family Frontier*, Boston: Brill, (2011), p. 21.

⁵⁵ K. Al Khamissi, *Monit [Taxi]*, Jerusalem: Carmel, (2014), p. 35.

⁵⁶ U. Furman, "Mitzrayim: Ha-omnam Mahapecha? [Egypt: Indeed, a Revolution?]," in E. Podeh and O. Winckler (ed.), *Ha-Gal Ha-Shelishi: Mechaa ve-Mahapecha be-Mizrach ha-Tichon [The Third Wave: Protest and Revolution in the Middle East]*, Jerusalem: Carmel, (2017), p. 181.

world: democracy and human and women's rights.⁵⁷ In addition, Al Jazeera gave sympathetic coverage to bloggers who were arrested and beaten, and activists reported the arrests of their friends in order to create international pressure for their release.⁵⁸ Cameras thus became weapons in the campaign to oust Arab leaders.

This coverage did not go unnoticed by Western media. Thus, Wael Abbas, the journalist who created and managed the largest blog in Egypt, "Egyptian Awareness,"⁵⁹ where he shared information from many other bloggers and which had between half a million and two million users every month, received the title "Middle East Person of the Year" by CNN.⁶⁰ TV channels that covered the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria from December 2010 until June 2011 emphasized the personal-emotional side more so than the political angle.⁶¹ Protestors took to the streets and also ensured that the revolution would be covered in media sources that were alternatives to the state's channels. Al Jazeera's reports on uprisings in Tunisia and the ousting of Tunisia's leader instilled hope among Arab young people that they could bring about change in their countries as well. Together, the protestors became a critical mass that drew inspiration from protestors in other countries who also channeled their anger into revolutionary activities.⁶²

Al Jazeera and other websites formed an ecosystem: people planned activities on Facebook, coordinated them on Twitter, discussed their opinions on blogs, and shared written and video information in messages and on YouTube. Al Jazeera helped spread YouTube videos, which were a central source of information in place of traditional media that were biased in favor of the regime. Thus, when the Egyptian regime blocked access to the Internet on January 27-28, 2011 and prohibited Al Jazeera from broadcasting, this blockage was ineffective because physical social networks, the Al Jazeera website, and young activists' phones continued to report on uprisings.⁶³ These forms of media brought hundreds of thousands of protestors to

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 72.

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 105-106.

⁵⁹ Wael Abbas, "Blog al-wa'ai al masri" [Egyptian Awareness blog], <http://misrdigital.blogspot.com/>.

⁶⁰ Zvi Barel, "Shoter Boet Be-Zman Ement" [Police Officer Kicking in Real Time], Haaretz, (October 30, 2006) . <https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/1.1149670>.

⁶¹ C. Garoian, "In the Event that Art Occurs", Visual Arts Research (39:1, 2013), p. 25.

⁶² A. Elmishiti, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDKgTNKY0ss> ("Oh nightingale of the revolution, if the darkness lasts, the truth has its own light."), March 21, 2012.

⁶³ M. Grondahl, Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, (2012), p. 14.

the main squares of Egyptian cities.⁶⁴ The Emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Khalifa, was accused of using Al Jazeera to incite Arab youth in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya, and Yemen.⁶⁵ Using the capital it had and its media assets, Qatar succeeded in disseminating a revolutionary discourse among millions of young Arabs, calling on them on them to reject their oppression and create an Arab national entity with open borders, along the lines of the European Union.⁶⁶

Young people hoped that if they did away with the patriarchal order within the family and within the state, it would affect broader change as well.⁶⁷ These young people's first message was thus to their parents, who had made them "children of the state" and forced upon them blind obedience, while submitting to poor educational, cultural, and communication norms.⁶⁸ Thus they chanted and sang in the city squares: "This is a revolution of the youth"; "we are silenced", and "how long will we be poor for?!".⁶⁹

For the first time, young people who were members of student organizations and professional unions and worked as journalists, bloggers, artists, and computer engineers began to challenge their parents' authority.⁷⁰ Educated young people refused to accept their parents' submission to the life of degradation that the regime had forced upon them, criticized their parents' illiteracy, and challenged the honor due to the patriarch of the family.⁷¹ Young people whose dreams and aspirations were not given weight in the patriarchal and conservative society also expressed themselves through graffiti art, protest writing, and rap music.⁷²

⁶⁴ B. Hamdy and D. Karl, *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution*, Berlin: *From Here to Fame*, (2014), p. 259.

⁶⁵ Grondahl, *Revolution Graffiti*, p.163.

⁶⁶ Marzan, *Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha*, p. 111.

⁶⁷ T. Scheff, *Bloody Revenge, Emotions, Nationalism and War*, New York: *Routledge*, (2020), pp. 1-4.

⁶⁸ A documentary about the art scene in Cairo after the revolution, "*The Noise of Cairo*" follows the interconnected relationships between artists and the revolution in Egypt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pi8FUERht2o>.

⁶⁹ Website of the Yemenite artist Murad Subay: <https://muradsubay.com/campaigns/12-hours/>.

⁷⁰ J. Cole, *The New Arabs: How the Millennial Generation is Changing the Middle East*, New York: *Simon & Schuster*, (2014), p. 14. Quoted in Marzan.

⁷¹ L. Austin, "*The politics of Youth Bulge: From Islamic Activism to Democratic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*", *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 31:2 (2011), p. 84.

⁷² "*Graffiti for a Social Cause: Zeft, Nazeer, Nemo and Mona Lisa Brigades*" *Suzeeinthecity*, 11.3.2013, <https://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2013/03/11/graffiti-for-a-social-cause-zeft-nazeer-nemo-and-mona-lisa-brigades/>.

The second message of the protesting youth was directed not to their biological parents but to the political “father,” who, according to Middle Eastern Arab culture, was “the responsible adult of the family,” to whom members of the national family were meant to submit themselves, standing by his side even if he erred. The protestors understood that instead of taking care of individuals’ welfare and the country’s cultural and religious heritage, the regime was looting the state’s treasures. It was not acting as the head of national family but rather degraded and humiliated its children. It killed those who opposed it on charges of heresy or treason, prevented adequate education or employment, and was directly responsible for the high rates of poverty and illiteracy.⁷³

Young people found it difficult to call Egyptian presidents Sadat and Mubarak “the father of the family,” just as Libyans found it difficult to call President Gaddafi “Father Muammar,” as he demanded.⁷⁴ The 2011 riots made it clear that the revolutionaries would not respect those considered “the adults of the family” if they did not act responsibly and respect them in turn. It wasn’t a coincidence that the first protest event in Egypt was on January 25, 2011, the day celebrating the 1952 Egyptian civil struggle against the British army – just this time, the struggle was not against the outside occupier but rather against the occupier at home, the Egyptian police.⁷⁵

In 2005, a popular Egyptian movement arose by the name of “We See You” (whose logo was a watchful eye) in order to monitor the election process for the presidency. This motif intensified during the 2011 protests, and Mahmoud Mahmoud Street, which leads to Tahrir Square, earned the nickname of “the eyes of freedom.” A similar organization, “I Am Watching,” was established in Tunisia in February 2011, while in Libya, a popular symbol was of a map of Libya inside the pupil of an eye watching the regime.⁷⁶

Satirical YouTube videos by an Egyptian blogger named Ahmed Sharif depicted President Mubarak as the head of a band of thieves brutalizing civilians⁷⁷ and former President Ahmed

⁷³ S. Joseph and S. Slyomovics, "Introduction", in *Women and Power in the Middle East*, ed. Suad and Slyomovics, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, (2000), p. 7.

⁷⁴ M. Mesrati, "My Family and Friends in Libya Did Not Die in Vain", *Telegraph*, 10.10.2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8839087/My-family-and-friends-in-Libya-did-not-die-in-vain.html>.

⁷⁵ Wael Ghonim, *Al thawrah 2.0*, 2012. p. 277-8.

⁷⁶ Marzan, *Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha*, p.151.

⁷⁷ “Mr. Mubarak, 26 Years is Enough, Kefaya Song,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbEM6soTHOA>.

Nazif as a murderer and civilian torturer.⁷⁸ Police officers were shown torturing and raping their fellow countrymen.⁷⁹ The regime found the use of political humor difficult because it devalued the ruler's respect and status.⁸⁰ In another YouTube video, created by a young person from Alexandria named Modi Azat and watched by 1.3 million people, Mubarak seems to change characters – from king to pharaoh; between Hitler and an Israeli or American collaborator, all against the background of a braying donkey.⁸¹ In Syria, speeches by President Assad during the protests served as fertile ground for ridicule by the protestors. Because the government branded protestors as “foreign infiltrators” or “bacteria,” protestors answered in the same language, and they started Facebook groups with names such as “infiltrators” or “bacteria of freedom.” In these videos, Assad, who was an ophthalmologist by training, is depicted as squinting – everything he saw and depicted was fake and distorted.⁸² He was shown as a drug addict, snorting the dust of the remains of dead civilians and their destroyed homes up his nose, as a donkey whom the masses spit upon, or as a lame duck. His official portrait was smeared with feces and placed next to a bathroom.⁸³ Political humor united youth in different Arab countries and created solidarity among Arab youth who put up signs with slogans such as “Syrian bacteria drink a toast with Libyan rats,”⁸⁴ or “Gaddafi is the king of the kings of Africa, and Bashar al-Assad is the king of the kings of the mafia.”⁸⁵

Young people emphasized courage over fear and made use of images of anti-colonial Arab heroes of history and Greek mythology: Hercules killing a lion (“assad” in Arabic)⁸⁶ or Prometheus, who returned fire (a symbol of wisdom) to the people after it had been stolen by the god Zeus, which symbolized a heroic struggle against the upper forces in order to bring about liberation of the spirit and achieve freedom.⁸⁷ The protestors also used animalization

⁷⁸ “Egyptian Postcard 2- Brutality, Egypt,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzK1KKlypKw>.

⁷⁹ “Sexual Torture Under Mubarak,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2kMzrFHT-Y>.

⁸⁰ B. Camps-Ferber, “Political Humor as a Confrontational Tool Against the Syrian Regime”, Institute Catala International, 2012, pp. 48-9.

⁸¹ “Egypt, Hosni Mubarak,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rNK3hfeGMc.

⁸² Camps-Ferber, *Political Humor*, 2012. p.55.

⁸³ M. Cooke, *Dancing in Damascus: Creativity, Resilience and the Syrian Revolution*, New York: *Routledge*, (2016), pp. 49-50.

⁸⁴ A. Masarwah Srouf, *Nashot ha-Misgad: Lemida Hatranit Shel Yeda Dati [Women of the Mosque: Subversive Learning of Religious Knowledge]*, Tel Aviv: *Resling*, (2017), p. 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 36-37.

⁸⁶ K. Al Khamissi, *Monit*, 2014. p. 14.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 74-75.

(ascribing animal traits to humans) in order to metaphorically represent their criticisms of their leaders.⁸⁸

A major message that the protestors sent was not against their biological fathers or the “national father,” but rather “the Western father” – that is, countries from whom they had freed themselves from the yolk of colonialism but not from their dependence on them. Young Arabs saw these countries as trying to create Arab consumers for their goods for their own financial gain, while maintaining Arab dictatorial rule so that they, in turn, could maintain Western interests in the Mediterranean.⁸⁹

Criticism of Mubarak, which intensified during the Arab Spring, led to his resignation, and Egyptian bloggers ensured that his resignation was accompanied by satirical videos and blogs documenting his cooperation with the West.⁹⁰ In the political humor and cartoons that accompanied the uprisings in Syria, there was prominent mockery of the hypocrisy of the UN and Arab League, who sent inspectors to check whether Assad was violating human rights while simultaneously ignoring tanks on the streets.⁹¹ In Tunisia, a group of artists called “Cave People” expressed young Arabs’ cognitive and emotional dissonance between Western and Arab cultures. They wrote terms such as “anti-Oedipus,” “the Supreme Self,” “liberation,” “schizophrenia,” and more on the walls of public spaces and in online forums in order to reflect their dissatisfaction with both the Arab world and the West.⁹²

As part of the uprisings, regular citizens became independent journalists; equipped with phones and cameras, they spread the voices of the revolution through various media sources, including visual art.⁹³ Indeed, the Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, who burned himself to death and catalyzed the Tunisian uprising, was a visual artist of a sort: his suicide turned a spotlight on social ills and turned marginalized individuals into legible citizens in

⁸⁸ Ghonim, *Al thawrah 2.0*, 2012. p. 85.

⁸⁹ Erlich, *Dorot shel meri*, 2012. P.226.

⁹⁰ “*Hosni Mubarak’s Constitutional Amendments*,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Du6dA-91IW&t=72s>

⁹¹ Camps-Ferber, *Political Humor*, 2012. p. 60-61.

⁹² Marzan, *Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha*, (2021). P.210.

⁹³ R. L. M. Saad, “*Art and Cultural Identity: Visual Arts and Egyptian Cultural Identity After the Revolution of 2011*”, *The International Conference: Cities’ Identity Through Architecture and Arts*, pp. 6-7, <https://press.ierek.com/index.php/ARChive/article/download/104/PDF>.

public space.⁹⁴ In a complementary way, graffiti artists and rap musicians used social media and the Internet to make revolutionary moves against oppressive power structures.⁹⁵

“Cultural resistance” introduced new rhetoric to the public sphere. Artists spread the spirit of the revolution and served as a barometer of revolutionary fervor. The art produced by and for the masses helped to demonstrate solidarity across gender, age, level of education, ideology, class, and religious identity. This artistic solidarity empowered protestors and ensured the continuation of the revolution while placing the protestors at the center of political discourse.⁹⁶ Artists used visual language and symbols to try and change the image of the Arab as a victim of religion and the regime. Using graffiti and public art, protestors expressed their collective suffering and created a social network that crossed geographic and social boundaries, exposing revolutionary discourse and symbols to passers-by in public space as well.⁹⁷

Graffiti was an important tool of resistance that young people used. Through graffiti, young people dismantled the official, tyrannical story that reigned in the public sphere and crafted a new, more ethical story, rooted in civic and political activism.⁹⁸ Much of the public art and graffiti was photographed, and these photographs were disseminated in traditional media and posted on social media. The Internet thus became an alternative space to the official space of the regime and preserved the memory of artistic protests even after its physical signs had been erased by the authorities.⁹⁹

The 2011 uprisings also included music – generally rap music, which expressed anger and frustration and drew inspiration from the West as an anti-establishment protest tool. Most of the revolution’s musicians were members of fringe bands who sang underground, and although some of these songs were banned from being played in Egypt, young people

⁹⁴ N. Aviad and N. Zitzman, “*Paskol Shel ha-Mahapechot: Ha-Shirim she-Livu et ha-Taltelot be-Medinot Arav be-Shanim 2010-2015* [Soundtrack of Revolutions: The Songs that Accompanied the Upheavels in Arab Countries Between 2010-2015],” Jerusalem: Minerva, (2016), p. 60.

⁹⁵ Anastasia Valassopoulos and Dalia Mostafa, “*Popular Protest Music and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution*”, *Popular Music and Society*, 37:5 (2014): p. 646.

⁹⁶ M. Grondahl, *Tahrir Square: The Heart of the Egyptian Revolution*, Cairo: *The American University in Cairo Press*, (2011), p. 113.

⁹⁷ Grondahl, *Revolution Graffiti*, 2012. p. 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p.7; “*Telling the Story of the Arab Spring: An Interactive Graffiti Map*,” Muftah.

⁹⁹ E. Machter and A.M. Machter, *Caricature, Interpretation, and Critic*, Tel Aviv: *Resling*, (2014), p. 48.

watched them on YouTube and took inspiration from them.¹⁰⁰ Music thus decreased despair and increased hope for change among a new, younger generation.¹⁰¹

Anger over years of injustice, degradation, and governmental repression, alongside hopes to bring about change, increased young people's willingness to endanger themselves through civil disobedience and go out to the streets despite their parents' opposition.¹⁰² The ousting of the Tunisian president aroused hope and faith in young people in neighboring countries that they would be able to bring about similar change in their own countries.¹⁰³ They wrote on walls the word "hope" or "we are destined to hope,"¹⁰⁴ and waved signs with the message of Martin Luther King: "we have a dream – our demand is freedom."¹⁰⁵ The outbreak of the uprisings filled them with great joy.¹⁰⁶ "Maybe I'm not educated, maybe I'm hungry, but I'm not stupid, and I'm not fearful," Egyptian young people wrote on protest signs.¹⁰⁷ They knew they could be killed, injured, imprisoned, or tortured, but they could not allow themselves to lose this opportunity for change.¹⁰⁸

The uprising was presented as a rebirth: young people called on those who had closed their ears, eyes, and mouths to stop being afraid and to cast off the silence that legitimizes the government.¹⁰⁹ In May 2011 in Cairo, the "Tahrir Monologues" was staged as a theater performance in which young people raised their voices.¹¹⁰ The regime, which had lost its main tools to make the masses fearful and ashamed was now coming to fear the masses and

¹⁰⁰ Camp-Ferber, 2012, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 50.

¹⁰² Grondahl, Tahrir Square, 2011. p. 71.

¹⁰³ W. Perlman, "Emotions and the Micro-Foundations of the Arab Uprising", *Perspectives and Politics* 11:2 (2013), p. 389.

¹⁰⁴ "Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution," <https://creativememory.org>.

¹⁰⁵ Khaled Il-Muheir, "Adel al-Mosheiti: The Revolutionary Singer of Libya", *Al Jazeera*, (February 20, 2012). The Libyan singer Adel al-Mosheiti sang in his song "We Will Stay Here" about Hassan al-Marimi, a freedom fighter from Libya, who was imprisoned after waving a slogan in the streets of Benghazi "we have a dream. Our demand is freedom." He decided to sacrifice his life, along with another some 750 protesters in protecting the values of freedom.

¹⁰⁶ Perlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, 2017. p. 83.

¹⁰⁷ Abu-salih Mustafa, 'Al saitara 'ala al nafs 'an tariq shabakat al tawasul' [Mind control through social networks], (*Al Jazeera*, 26.6.2018) <https://www.aljazeera.net/blogs/2018/6/26>

¹⁰⁸ Perlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, 2017. p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ "Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution," <https://creativememory.org>.

¹¹⁰ Al-Bakry and Maggor, *Tahrir Tales*, 2016. p. 61.

be ashamed of its actions. Pictures of signs with slogans such as “the people don’t need to fear the governments; governments need to fear their people” were posted on social media. Body language changed: representations of eyes, mouths, and hands that had symbolized fear, silence, submission, and passivity began to express a discourse of courage and activism – hands were raised upwards and turned into clenched fists: “silence is not for us,”¹¹¹ “I am a free person.”¹¹²

Protestors also appealed specifically to mothers in graffiti, inscriptions, and songs. They appealed to mothers following persecution, arrests, and physical harm against young people: “A message to the mother of Khaled Saeed – oh mother, see your true children gathering for the sake of your son.”¹¹³ In Egypt, the masses identified with the mother of Khaled Saeed, who herself participated in mass protests for her martyred son.¹¹⁴ A post by Wael Ghonim on the Facebook page “We Are All Khaled Saeed” described the disdain and emotional disinterest of Mubarak and police officers in dead Egyptian children. Young people identified with children who had been murdered by the police and wrote to Mubarak: “... The blood of our brethren has not been spilled for naught. When you laugh at us and offer us a raise of 15%, you presumably don’t understand who the young people of Egypt are.”¹¹⁵

In Libya, the masses sympathized with the pain of mothers whose sons were murdered in the Abu Salim prison, to whom Gaddafi said, “you can give birth to other sons, but there is only one Gaddafi.”¹¹⁶ In Syria, too, the masses sympathized with the protests of political prisoners’ wives and with parents whose children had been abused by the police, who, like in Libya, were told to forget their children and give birth to new children.¹¹⁷ Protestors highlighted the etymological connection between the word “nation”(Ummah)and the word “mother”(Um) and its connection to fertility and demography and added a moral-emotional aspect to this usage in introducing the womb as a symbol of ethical rebirth. Graffiti and billboards read:

¹¹¹ Grondahl, *Revolution Graffiti*, 2012. p. 45, 58.

¹¹² A. A. Rassoul, “Tahrir Graffiti,” <https://www.pinterest.com/ahmedabdelrasso/tahrir-graffiti>.

¹¹³ Ghonim, *Al thawrah 2.0*, 2012. p. 93.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.294.

¹¹⁶ A. El-Taguri (qtd. In Marzel p. 140).

¹¹⁷ R. Mahmoud, "Syrian Women's Revolution: The New Women of Quarish". *Ibid.* pp. 202-203.

“Freedom will be born from the homeland’s womb” and “the more you kill, the more Syria will continue to give birth.”¹¹⁸

Interestingly, the young protestors used spoken Arabic on social media, rather than the literary Arabic that was used by the leaders of the regime.¹¹⁹ The leaders of the regime had a clear interest in emphasizing the protestors’ “betrayal” of literary Arabic in favor of foreign languages and local, spoken dialects, which were considered the idioms of the ignorant masses, so that they could blame the younger generation for breaking away from Arab identity and culture and sowing division.¹²⁰ The protestors used several languages: French, English, and both spoken and literary Arabic and sought to create a shared linguistic space in which both spoken and literary Arabic could exist alongside one another.¹²¹ The activist Wael Ghonim, for example, preferred to use spoken Arab on his Facebook page “We Are All Khaled Saeed” because it was closer to the hearts of the young people.¹²²

Young people tried to bridge not only spoken and written Arabic but also the divide between secularism and religion. This was in the revolutionary spirit of uniting young people from all walks of life and religious outlooks. The youth of the Muslim Brotherhood, who joined the protests as individuals, waved signs lacking a religious Muslim character.¹²³ Young bloggers who were active in the Muslim Brotherhood and wanted personal choice left the movement and joined leftwing, liberal groups or liberal Muslim parties.¹²⁴ They preferred bridging between their Muslim identities and the modern world, protested the traditional view that “Islam is the solution,” and demanded that issues such as democracy, civil liberties, and social justice be on the agenda.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ Marzen, Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha, 2021. p. 250.

¹¹⁹ R. Bassiouney, "Language and Revolution in Egypt", *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* 163 (2013): pp. 85-6.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 99.

¹²¹ Ibid. pp.100, 105.

¹²² Ghonim, *Al thawrah 2.0*, 2012. p. 75-76.

¹²³ W. Sawah, "Activism in Syria", in: Lina Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*, London: *I.B. Tauris*, (2013), p.148.

¹²⁴ Cole, p. 70-71.

¹²⁵ J. Zdanowski, *Middle Eastern Societies in the 20th Century*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, (2014), pp. 313-4.

The Arab Spring accelerated an intergenerational struggle that had begun years earlier. Women also waged a double battle, both within the private home and in the political arena.¹²⁶ In November 2011, out of anger towards her family and society about its views towards her body and her freedom, Aliaa Magda Elmahdy, an Egyptian blogger in her 20s, decided to post a nude photo of herself on her blog. She did so in order to protest male control over the female body, sexual assault, and femicide, as well as to challenge the conservative culture that limited nude art to private galleries. As a result, Elmahdy was forced to flee Egypt following threats she received from Islamic groups who called for her body to be burnt and for her Egyptian citizenship to be nullified.¹²⁷

The revolution led women to newly reject the idea that there is no place for strong women in Arab patriarchal society. The sentence “the revolution is female” was repeated again and again on the Facebook pages of female Arab activists. An Egyptian named Mona Prince wrote a memoir entitled *Revolution Is My Name*, which used subversive, humorous language to promote gender roles that differed from the patriarchal norms that prevailed in private homes and public space.¹²⁸ Female protestors often used the first-person “I” to locate themselves as individuals with a desire for self-actualization, as well as verbs and nouns that expressed activism and subversion of the controlling patriarchal generation: “your freedom is contingent on rebellion and your disobedience.”¹²⁹

Just days before the outbreak of uprisings in January 2011, Asmaa Mahfouz, a young Egyptian who was one of the founders of the movement April 6, posted a YouTube video, in which she shared, “I am a girl, and I am going out to Tahrir Square... If you have honor and you are a person and a man in this land, you need to come out to protect me and every other girl. Do not fear the regime, fear our God... go out and demand what you deserve, what I deserve, what your family deserves, and what we all deserve.”¹³⁰ She drew upon traditional patriarchal discourse: Allah, family, man, girl, and honor, but this time not with the goal of oppression but in order to protect women. Wael Ghonim wrote that the video had an impact on followers of his Facebook page, and that for many of them, she broke through their fear.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Marzan, Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha, 2021. p. 285.

¹²⁷ Hamdy and Karl, Walls of Freedom, 2014. p. 63.

¹²⁸ Cole, p. 274.

¹²⁹ Marzan, Ha-av, ha-ben ve-ruah ha-mahapecha, 2021. p. 322-3.

¹³⁰ "Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution", 2.2.2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgJgMdsEuk>.

¹³¹ Ghonim, Al thawrah 2.0, 2012. p. 180.

Women's revolutionary rhetoric, however, was legitimate in the eyes of men only so long as it did not question power relations between the sexes.¹³²

Conclusion

In this article, we surveyed briefly the reasons and stages of the outbreak of the Arab Spring, and examined the role of young people in it, focusing on a core tool that was available to them for the first time: The Internet and social media. The Arab Spring proved that young people were able to bring about change nonviolently. The main argument here is that social media, primarily Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, music, art, and humor, was recruited and reached wider parts of society and by that played an influential role and taught some Arab governments, that had doubted the power of social media, an important lesson.

One could argue that social media was the wind that spread the fire of social, economic, and political combustible material, stirred the emotions of young people, and caused them to become disillusioned with the Arab regimes. Nevertheless, the major question is: will the growth of new forms of media and the increase in the number of users, especially young people, change something in the Arab world? It is important to note that the youth protests in the Arab Spring served as a catalyst for youth protests and social movements in other countries, from Y'en a Marre ("Fed Up") in Senegal, Los Indignados ("the indignant ones") in Spain, the international Occupy movement focusing on economic and social inequality, #FreeMustFall in South Africa, the Umbrella Movement that sprouted up during protests for democracy in Hong Kong in 2014, and #BlackLivesMatter in the United States, a protest movement against police brutality and institutional racism against Black people. Many of these started during a second wave of protests in 2019, following in the path of the Arab Spring.¹³³

According to CFR, a US policy institute specializing in foreign affairs, which examined the influences of the Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria ten years later, democratic process did not continue afterwards, except for in Tunisia; standards of living decreased in Libya, Syria, and Egypt and remained stable in Tunisia and Egypt; youth unemployment remained high in all of the countries; freedom of the press was not achieved,

¹³² Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* [Shleta gabrit] (translation: Avner Lahav), Tel Aviv (2007), pp. 8-97.

¹³³ A. Honwana, "Are Global Youth Protests Learning From the Arab Spring?", *LSE*, 27.11.2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2019/11/27/are-global-youth-protests-learning-from-the-arab-spring/>

and arrests and imprisonments of journalists even increased, especially in Egypt; governmental corruption also remained unchanged when compared to the eve of the revolution (in Egypt and Tunisia) or worsened (in Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and Syria); only women's empowerment was one meaningful measure that changed for the good in most of these countries.¹³⁴

The revolution that young people attempted to bring about achieved limited results because of a lack of organization and stamina to create a meaningful sociopolitical agenda. One of the reasons for this is that most of the protestors came from the lower-middle class and had lower levels of education, and their knowledge and skills were thus insufficient for the demands of a rapidly advancing world. Indeed, as long as Arab educational systems continue to be of low quality, the situation of young people will not improve.¹³⁵

Nevertheless, the Arab Spring created a recruited media revolution, and it is reasonable to assume that its influence will only increase in the future as communication between civilians becomes increasingly able to drive social and political action.

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¹³⁴ K. Robinson and W. Merrow, "The Arab Spring at Ten Years: What's the Legacy of the Uprising?", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 3.12.2020, <https://www.cfr.org/article/arab-spring-ten-years-whats-legacy-uprisings>.

¹³⁵ A. Adams and R. Winthrop, "The Role of Education in the Arab World Revolution", *Brookings*, 10.6.2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-role-of-education-in-the-arab-world-revolutions>.

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