The Communication of Participation
-
an exploratory study of the effects of social media on social change

Bachelor Thesis in Marketing & Management Communication

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Abstract

This paper examines the effects of social media on social change. The study seeks to establish to what extend social media can influence social change in the light of the recent revolutions in Northern Africa and the continuous focus on social media tools such as Wikileaks, Facebook, Twitter, blogs etc. Social media is found to be a possible support tool or even catalytic to social change, but not immediately the cause for social change in itself.

The paper takes its starting point in a short review of the most dominant social change theories in order to create a framework within which social media is to be viewed. Social media is then analysed through the lenses of the participatory paradigm. Social media differs from other media forms due to its user-generated content, which is communicated in network structures allowing for interaction and processes of sense making. Taking a social constructivist perspective on society, it is argued that this opens new spaces for people to construct reality and thereby change their society. The cases examined however highlight that social media is used for a variety of purposes and with a wide range of effects. Social media can have a positive impact by enabling citizen action, but can at the same time be used for oppression and political immunisation.

Due to this highly context dependent picture of social media and the very limited research into the field, this paper should be viewed as an exploratory study. The paper aims at determining the range of processes and structures of social media, that can play a role in social change and upon which further research should be conducted to understand how individual effects can be triggered, used or prevented.

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1.0 Introduction

"Reality is a scarce resource – one which people compete to control. In the digital era, this competition for reality remains fierce, but the raw material is no longer in short supply. Defining reality…is one of the central phenomena of the media." James Carvey[1]

In this paper I will look at the connection between social media and social change. The patterns of social change have been researched intensively for a long time as to be able to understand, trigger and foresee social change, but social media has added a new dimension to the discussion in the last few years. With the current development in the Arab world, the discussion of the role of social media with respect to social change has gained new relevance, as the argument has been put forth, that Wikileaks, Twitter and various blogs caused the revolutions currently sweeping through this part of the world. This paper does not seek to scrutinise the cause-effect relationship between social media and revolutions in the Arab world in detail, but tries instead to look at the processes and structures of social media, that can play a role in social change. My research question is thus as follows:

What effects has social media on social change?

Specifically I will examine:

- Can social media cause social change?
- In what way does the participatory character of social media enhance the possible effects on social change?

To answer these questions I first look at theories of social change, as to establish a framework. A short overview of the development and characteristics of social media follows. In the theories I continuously focus on the communication patterns involved in social change and social media, as communication is the space of the creation of reality. Through communication, interaction and action we create our own reality, and the media has a pivotal role in defining and representing the accepted realities of a society. These realities are challenged in situations of social change, and therefore it is essential for agents of change to have access to communication vehicles. The

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[1] In: Boler, p.11

new, participatory, form of communication inherent in social media is very interesting in this sense. In the analysis part I will look at different uses of social media and social change in order to analyse how social media has caused, helped or hindered social change, and if social media lives up to its participatory and revolutionizing characteristics.

1.1 Method

In this paper a social constructivist approach to knowledge, theories and research will be used. In this view people do not react on a given reality, but instead shape and create reality through their actions and interactions. Social constructivism believes that all *"concepts are human constructions"*[2], i.e. everything that exists is constructed through our interaction with it and knowledge about it, which in turn is shaped by the social context. In other words, participation in society creates reality. This paper accepts a position that effective social change is created through the people´s participation, understanding them as the creators of reality. In the same vein is social media viewed as a participatory medium in which people construct their own relations, meanings and uses. The reality that social media presents differs therefore within different social contexts.

A social constructivist understanding of society can also be found in the theories of most of the scholars I lean on: Castells, who describes the design of the social structure today and Dean, who describes the negative effects of social media, base their research on an understanding of reality being constructed, e.g. through media. Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte believe that people have to shape their own reality through participation and base this on a process view of communication, which is closely linked to social constructivism.

Social constructivism also touches upon concepts of knowledge in saying that it always is relative: *"[…]epistemic relativism. This is the view that there is no absolute warrant for any belief— that rational warrant makes sense only relative to a culture, or an individual, or a paradigm.*"[3] Any belief, concept or knowledge is thus not predetermined, but constructed

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[2]Kukla, p. 3
[3]Kukla, p. 4

through social reality. Because of this I have for this paper chosen the method of the case study[4], a qualitative approach to research that seeks to understand instances of social change within this framework of the constructed social reality. Case studies can describe *"chunks of reality"*[5] and seek to increase knowledge about real events in their context[6]. By looking at the specific case within its specific context I hope to be able to determine in what ways social media shapes and induces social change. The cases used in this paper are consciously cherry-picked to show a variety of effects of social media and highlight its complexity, but are certainly not exhaustive. The aim is to show a broad picture, thus reaching for some measure of objectivity in addressing the issue from more than one side. However, the goal of this paper is not to develop a general rule of social media and social change, but to highlight certain aspects of the phenomena. The goal is not to test and solve a certain theory, but to generate a hypothesis about the nature of social media and social change.

1.2 Delimitations

Both the field of social change and social media are huge, dealing with concepts and theories from other disciplines when trying to gain an understanding of each. Social media research is further complicated, as the phenomenon is relatively new and research results scarce. The model below gives a short overview of some of the disciplines that are necessarily involved in explaining social change and social media´s influence on change. It is natural that it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into depth with all the concepts. The focus of this paper is on communication within social change and media, which also touches upon concepts of knowledge, learning, behaviour etc.

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[4]In this paper the case study is of theoretical nature only, but most often case studies are connected to field research. Field research is out of the scope of this paper, but should certainly be conducted if the topic is to be understood more detailed.
[5]Daymon & Holloway, p. 106
[6]Daymon & Holloway, p. 105

Figure 1: Research fields related to the analysis of social media´s effects on social change

The focus of this paper is on participatory change theories, even though a wide range of other theories exist. This is due to the participatory character of social media, which I believe gains its greatest relevance if social change is understood through a lens of citizen participation. Due to the novelty of social media there is very little academic literature about its effects, especially on social change. My analysis is thus based upon articles and blog entries, which have been reviewed, commented upon and criticised by others (bloggers, scholars, professors, etc), but for the most part have not been part of an academic research procedure. As more research is conducted however, it should of course be included in an analysis of effects of social media, but until then I belief that the diversity and agility of blogs can function as foundation for a discussion of social media.

A short overview of the most important milestones and actors in the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt can be found in the appendix.

2.0 Theory

2.1. Social Change Theories

2.1.1 Introduction

This paper is about social media´s effects on social change. Social change can be understood in various ways, determining how it is thought to be brought about. I will therefore in this section examine three different paradigms of social change, in order to create a frame of reference for social media effects. Furthermore communication patterns within social change theories have to be understood, especially in the light of social media being a communication tool – it is impossible to say how social media addresses social change, if the importance of communication for social change in general is not determined.

Clear cut definitions of social change are rare and are often understood to be inherent in theories of social change. The encyclopaedia Britannica defines social change as:

> *"The alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations, or value systems, where various theoretical schools emphasize different aspects of change"[7]*

I will here describe social change theories since WWII, as *"the systematic use of communication tools in development programmes started after the Second World War"[8]*. Social change has certainly been considered before the systematic use of models and tools, with Karl Marx´s thoughts on class struggle and social dependence being exemplary, but it is exactly the focus on communication tools, that is of interest for this paper.

When looking at theories of social change, development theory is often compared to or used interchangeably with social change, even though the two fields per definition are not the same. In fact, development models often state social change as their goal, while social change theorists base their thoughts on concepts of progress and improvement, and both are concerned with society. Professor Dr. Jan Servaes summarises the connection of development and social change, when arguing that development today is understood as an ethical-political process of social

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[7] http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/550924/social-change
[8] Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, p. xv

change[9]. The following review of modernisation, dependency and participatory social change are thus based on development literature and social change literature.

2.1.2 Modernisation

The modernisation paradigm developed after the Second World War, which caused countries to be more intertwined in an international community and at the same time put great focus on economic development[10]. The cold war fuelled this orientation, as bringing development to third world countries was viewed as a manifestation of power and success. In regards to development the world order was soon divided into successful growing nations and unsuccessful developing countries, and the transfer of information and knowledge to developing countries became the accepted way of generating development[11]. The modernisation of societies thus formed a top-down approach, where the focus was on the provision of information and capital to enable societies to copy successful states.

As development was understood as a pre-tested, determined process prescriptive models were common. The economist Rostow, who repeatedly worked in the White House, developed e.g. a theory of stages of growth, which every country has to pass through to reach modernisation. The very specific and standardised recommendations of the International Monetary Fond (IMF) exemplify this approach as well. Rostow admits to other factors influencing the development of a country than just economy, when introducing his theory with the words:

> *"While it is true that economic change has political and social consequence, economic change is, itself, viewed here as the consequence of political and social as well as narrowly economic forces."[12]*

Despite this the stages to modernisation described by Rostow are centred around "economic dimensions"[13] and take only minor notice of other processes as the cause for development. Servaes determines this as one of the key characteristics of the modernisation paradigm: the monodisciplinary explanations[14], which are challenged by especially the participatory paradigm.

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[9]Servaes, p. 14
[10]Servaes, p.18
[11]Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, p.xvi
[12]Rostow, p.2
[13]Rostow, p.4
[14]Servaes, p.21

It should be noted that political considerations did play a role in modernisation, but mostly as a tool of dominance and control in times of the cold war. Interest in economic stability was thus often coupled with interest in a certain political agenda, as e.g. the US´s involvement in military coups in South America highlights[15]. It was thus also from South America that a new paradigm for development and social change emerged, which challenged the ethnocentrism and "westernisation" of modernisation.

2.1.3 Dependency

In the 1960´s the dependency paradigm evolved, offering a new way of understanding development. As it became clear that only few countries had success at reaching social change and thriving economies as exemplified by western countries, proponents of the dependency theory argued that structural exploitation inherent in the international system was the core of the problem[16]. Gunder Frank, one of the leading figures of dependency theory explains how the dual effects of capitalism need to be recognised:

> *"Consequently, most of our theory fails to explain the structure and development of the capitalist system as a whole and to account for its simultaneous generation of underdevelopment in some of its parts and economic development in others"* [17]

In comparison to modernisation, dependency has a broader outlook on development, including political, social, economic and cultural factors. However, as Servaes points out, only few concrete suggestions to improvement spring from the dependency paradigm and these also focus on economic factors (total abolishment of capitalism, import substitution, state intervention, etc.)[18] and thus also fail to reflect the reality and development of countries[19]. It is thus the paradigm´s achievements in highlighting flaws in the thought patterns of modernisation that give it relevance. Dependency might not have created a new way of inducing social change, but it made clear that new ways were painfully needed. This is also reflected in the communication pattern within the dependency paradigm, where modernisation´s vertical communication was criticised, but no new ways of communication were put to use.

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[15]Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, p. xvii
[16]Ibid., p.xviii
[17]Frank
[18]Servaes, p. 35-42
[19]Ibid. p. 42

2.1.4 Communication in Modernisation and Dependency

Communication is a *"social function in society"*[20] that reacts on and reflects social change. Theorist James Carey takes this relationship further, when arguing that communication is the maintenance of society and the arena for representing shared beliefs[21], making communication essential for society. If society is the playing field for social change, then communication patterns describe the patterns of social change.

The concept of communication has been the cause for disagreement for as long as it has been studied. Generally there are two traditions within communication theory: The transmission tradition and the participatory tradition. In the transmission view, communication is purely the transmission of information, emotions etc. This function is extended to include *"participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding"*[22] in the participatory view, which regards communication as a process instead of an action happening to someone.

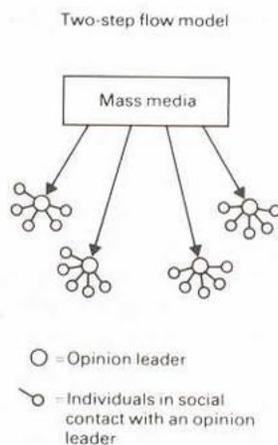In this section I will look at the transmission tradition only, as both modernisation and

Figure 2: Two step flow model of Communication Windahl et. al, 2009

dependency make use of this form of communication. Mass media such as radio, newspapers and TV were for a long time the recognised tool for mediated communication, forming a quick way to achieve results in addressing all kinds of social issues[23]. In the 50´s and 60´s scientists began to develop models of communication that added the dimension of interpersonal communication to dissemination. Research in an electoral campaign had shown that the public received information *"indirectly via so-called opinion leaders"*, who are superior in terms of their *"ability to influence and effect change"* compared to mass media[24].

These so called two-step flow models changed the way communication was done, but did not affect the direction or goals of communication. Senders of communication had to realise, that

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[20]Servaes, p. 4
[21]Windahl, p. 12
[22]Ibid.
[23]Servaes, p. 47
[24]Windahl, p. 70/72

their message was better adopted if personal communication occurred throughout the process of information processing and adaption, but the dissemination of information was still the goal of communication.

> *"This concept of massively sharing innovations[...]- from knowledge centres in the United States and Europe with less-advanced rural populations[...]-generated one of the most lasting communication paradigms in development."*[25],

one matching the needs of the modernisation paradigm.

Even though dependency arose as a reaction to the reality of modernisation, it shares the approach to communication. Multi-step flow models are based on vertical communication, seeking to gain certain effects through the transfer of selected information, which are to persuade the receiver[26]. As multi-step flow models do not allow for feedback, they give the sender the power to control communication. Proponents of the dependency paradigm criticised modernisation for this in arguing that: *"The one way flow of communication establishes a hierarchical relationship between the source...and the receiver [...]This results in dominant and dominated man-man relationships[...]"*[27] The forced dependency experienced by developing countries was thus also reflected in communication. Despite this dependency does not offer an improved way of communication and makes effectively also use of the multi-step flow models, though in a different frame of reference. Whereas modernisationists want to transfer knowledge internationally, knowledge is transferred intranationally in the dependency paradigm[28]. Feedback and participation of the receivers – the society and citizens – is not viewed as relevant. Modernisation and dependency thus make use of a generally passive media user, who receives, but does not engage. Opinion leaders are generally understood to be more active, as they seek information more determinedly and participate in the dissemination process. And even though social media can change the media landscape, it also functions within this space, by providing easier links to and from opinion leaders. Alexis Madrigal, researcher and writer in Science and Technology, expresses this when calling Twitter *"a kind of human recommendation engine."*[29]

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[25]Gumucio-Dagron &Tufte, p.xvi
[26]Servaes, p. 56
[27]Ibid., p. 29
[28]Ibid., p. 47
[29]Madrigal

2.1.5 Participatory paradigm

The participatory model of development and communication evolved from the dependency theorists, who were looking for a new way to development. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war were the starting point for a new debate about development and social change[30], as it became evident that established categories of judgement were going to change. The participatory paradigm is based on *"development that emphasises cultural identity, empowerment and multidimensionality"*[31]. Other factors than economic constraints thus came to gain relevance in the development discussion. Empowerment and participation lay the foundation for the realisation of development, and multidimensionality highlighted that development could not be viewed as a linear, prescribed process, but that every society had to find its own way to develop. Contrary to modernisation and dependency development thus became a bottom-up approach, where the participation of the citizen was necessary. *"...the assumption that affected people understand their realities much better than any "experts"...and they can become the drivers of their own change"*[32] lies at the heart of this. Inherent is a strengthening of democratic processes in a society by (re-)distributing power equally between citizens[33]. Within this approach, participatory communication becomes the essential tool, as it offers a way to tap into the knowledge of citizens and participants in change processes.

2.1.6 Participatory Communication

Participatory communication is fundamentally different from the mass media and multi-step flow theories of modernisation and dependency, as "*Dialogue is at the heart of communication for social change"*[34] in this paradigm. Everett Rogers, who originally was known for his work within the two-step flow models, distanced himself from the mass media approach in 1978, arguing that *"development is a widely participatory process of social change in a society[...] through their* (the people) *gaining greater control over their environment"*[35]. This means, communication control was put into the hands of citizens, making it a bottom-up approach that encouraged two-way communication, which in turn encouraged the diversification of opinions

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[30]Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, p. xxvii
[31]Servaes, p.50
[32]Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, p.xix
[33]Servaes, p. 93
[34]Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, p.xiv
[35]In: Windahl, p. 53

and knowledge. The relevance of this is, as mentioned before, based on the understanding that society only exists where shared knowledge is created[36], and thus society, knowledge and communication interconnects with each other. Access to communication for citizens as recommended by the participatory paradigm thus creates a full circle in which citizen analyse and discuss their society and thereby re-create society and uncover ways and goals to development. Ultimately, participatory communication leads to social change, as the basis of society - the shared knowledge Pasquali refers to - is constantly re-negotiated. The underlying inherent assumption in this approach is a favouring of democratic processes and consequently a threat to the power elite and/or others interested in maintaining the status quo[37].

The professor and mass communication researcher D. Shah has developed a model of the causal relationship of information seeking, civic communication and civic participation, which combines media uses with civic engagement. Social change, according to the participatory paradigm, is based on shared knowledge and civic interaction, a claim this model supports.
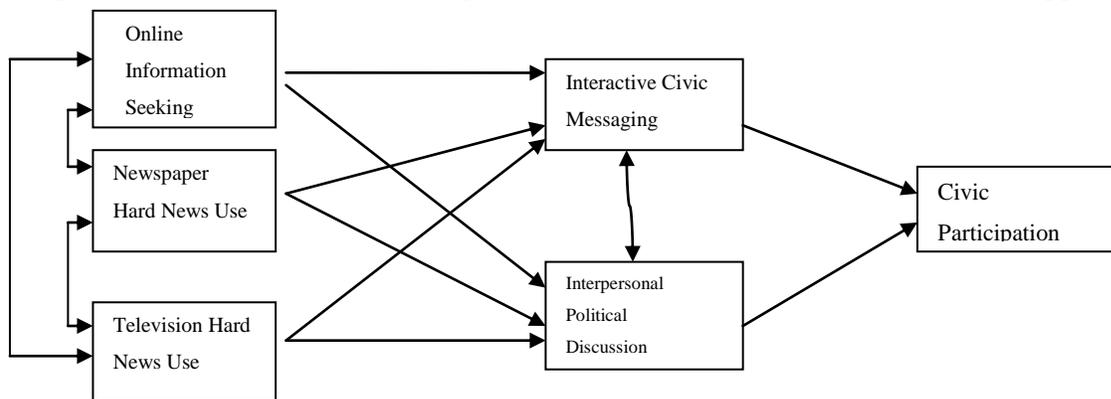
Figure 3: Theorised Model of Communication and Civic Participation
Shah et al., Communication Research, Oct. 2005

It describes a progression towards civic participation, based on the assumption that *"communication may be a critical intervening variable between news consumption…and civic engagement"[38]*. The argumentation is that offline media and parts of online media have the role of providing information, which *"promote(s) increased political knowledge…and awareness of civic opportunities and objectives"[39]*. The use of media for informational purposes directly leads

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[36]In: Gumucio-Dagron &Tufte, p.xxii
[37]Servaes, p. 89
[38]Shah et al., p.537
[39]Ibid., p.535

citizens to discuss and reflect about these issues, which in turn stimulates civic participation and action. The relationship between information, communication, knowledge and social change (incrementally or radically) is again highlighted and directly connected to media use, which subsequently enhances the possibility for social change. Social media functions at all three levels of the model, thus offering an important tool for social change.

Practical participatory communication can take various forms, but it is clear that both access to information and communication tools and participation in communication are necessary[40], but precisely how participatory media is created is a debated question within the paradigm. The new form of social media has in the last decade often been said to finally have found a way to ensure this participatory element, which will be the theme in the following section.

2.1.7 Conclusion

The point of this chapter was to give an introduction to theories of social change. Modernisation is based on an understanding of improvement, development and social change that is believed to be universally true, and with only one right way to development which has been defined by the success of the Western countries. Dependency makes headway to a more subjective definition of development by rejecting this one way to development, but does not yet recognise every society´s individual way to development. The participatory paradigm is entirely based on a subjective understanding of development, which has to be defined by every society itself. The three paradigms form a progression in their emergence, but it is important to emphasise that all three still exist today and debate about the right way to development continues.

In the following chapter I will describe the characteristics of social media in order to highlight how it fits into the participatory paradigm of social change. Because social media is a tool shaped by the Internet, I will first relate it to the development of the Internet itself, while the subsequent comparison to the print revolution in the 15th century shall highlight the effects of a shift in communication tools on society.

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[40]Servaes, p.85

2.2 Social Media

Social media is the buzz word in the past recent years, but what exactly does it entail? Researcher and media analyst Brian Solis offers a rather straight-forward definition of the phenomenon in saying:

> *"The democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers."[41]*

This definition highlights two core characteristics of social media: Communication is user-generated and it functions two-ways. It however neglects to comment on the consequences of social media such as e.g. knowledge creation, which are based on its intrinsic nature. In the same fashion most definitions are insufficient in highlighting all aspects of social media, which is why I will draw upon a description of the print revolution to shed light onto the characteristics of social media. Before looking at these effects it is however important to look at the development of the Internet itself, as social media cannot be viewed separate from it.

Manuel Castells, a renowned sociologist focusing on communication research, has in several books argued for the importance of the Internet´s development process for generating its relevance today. The Internet was created as a military and university experiment, which at no time was restricted by corporate goals or strategies, but thrived on researcher´s curiosity[42]. The Internet could thus develop free from regulation or other impediments into relatively great independence. Furthermore the development was based on free-flowing information in open-source codes between university scientists, who were influenced by the social movements of the 70´s in the USA, which emphasised freedom of speech and autonomy[43]. Sharing and innovation thus came to be at the core of the Internet, giving it a shape that constitutes its success today. It is not the purpose here to explain every feature of the Internet, but a few points are in order to highlight how the Internet has laid the foundation for social media tools, which can be understood as a continuation and strengthening of these features. The Internet offers great flexibility, as information availability, range and timeliness have greatly increased compared to

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[41]Solis
[42]Castells, 2004, p.20
[43]Ibid., p.21

other media outlets[44]. The participatory nature of the Internet has additionally transformed the expressive potential of the average citizens with unprecedented speed within just one decade[45]. Social media and its tools such as YouTube, Facebook, Wikileaks, Wikipedia, MySpace, Digg.com, blogs, Twitter etc. are all a total or partial extension upon this user-controlled, flexible, expressive character of the Internet. Blogs embrace this the most, as they allow for knowledge production, interactivity and network building, while Wiki-sites are built around user-controlled production of content and sites like Facebook and Twitter focus on networks and interactivity. Social media tools thus need to be understood in the framework of the Internet as a whole, but is it also important to keep in mind that user behaviour has a significant influence on the Internet: *"The Internet is a global communication network, but its use and its evolving reality are the product of human action under the specific conditions of differential history."*[46] The Internet and the new wave of participatory communication is therefore not a fix-all tool, but needs to be looked at in relation to societies, which are shaped by country-specific events and interpretations. The Internet and social media do not have one pre-determined effect on societies, but depend on the patterns of use within each society, as it is the participants own ways that lead to results, according to the participatory paradigm.

Castells has coined the Internet dominated age we live in "the network society" (opposed to the information or knowledge society), as society is shaped in and through the Internet as much as the Internet is shaped by society: *"A network society is a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies."*[47] This organisation into networks, he argues, is fundamentally changing our society, both in terms of communication but also in relation to behavioural patterns and democratic processes. Seen in relation to social change the network structure becomes a fundamental player in the power of social media to induce social change, in that it depends on the capabilities and strength of the network, if the promoted social change is to catch on and be reacted upon. The impact of the network structure on society is discussed in more detail in the analysis.

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[44]Shah et al., p.535
[45]Shah et al., p.536
[46]Castells, 2001, p.7
[47]Castells, 2004, p.3

2.2.1 Print revolution

The historian Elizabeth Eisenstein makes in her seminal work on the print revolution an attempt at uncovering the deeper effects and consequences of the introduction of print on society and communication. She argues, that the print revolution in fact was *"a communication or media revolution"*[48] that was constituted by a range of different factors working together. Social media has correspondingly changed the way communication can be done (for how many people it actually does change communication patterns is another question, one concerned with the digital divide).

One of the most paramount effects of the print revolution was its influence on knowledge and learning, which were affected in various ways. Eisenstein asserts that printing effectively created a *"knowledge explosion"*[49] in society. One of the reasons was the greatly increased amount of information that was made available through books, which made it possible to gain knowledge about more than ever before. Reinforcing itself, the more knowledge (books) was consumed, the bigger the demand was for more knowledge, in an act of *"combinatory intellectual activity"*[50]. Ultimately the combination of increased opportunity and curiosity for more knowledge lead to the creation of ever more knowledge, as scholars and readers were motivated to engage into discussion, exploration and research. Finally the available knowledge was increasingly controlled in terms of quality, as flawed and incorrect copies were soon addressed by readers and subsequently corrected.. These described effects on knowledge and innovation are also visible in the network society and enhanced through social media: Information is made available from everyone to everyone, creating an ever bigger pool of knowledge. Social media adds the additional element of easy accessible tools for discussion and interactivity, which strengthens the development of opinions, research, interests and the understanding of possibilities and opportunities. In other words, it creates a bigger consciousness in people about their world. Innovation was thus spurred by printing and is now spurred by social media along two dimensions: In the factual dimension of developing new knowledge, theories and research, and in a social dimension, in which opportunities and possibilities of society are discovered and discussed and ultimately lived by.

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[48]Eisenstein, p.14
[49] p.47
[50]Koestler, In: Eisenstein, p.49

The increased amount of knowledge and development of new ideas and thoughts however did not lead to a total abandonment of traditional theories, as Eisenstein points out. A great deal of old and wrong theories were cast out and quickly replaced, but many old theories continued to be studied and used. *"The advancement of learning had taken the form of a search for lost wisdom..."*[51] and as *"New, improved editions of ancient texts also began to accumulate"*[52] it was the old that helped advance the new. The availability of information thus forced people to consider and respond to their society and its belief systems.

The fact that information became more of a public good also led to a fundamental change in power relations, as students could harvest knowledge directly from books and did not need the mediation of their teachers[53]. Society took a different shape, because common people had the power to acquire knowledge. Power issues go equally to the heart of social media, even though social media also here has taken the process a step further. Social media does not only empower the students of the world through accessible information, it also empowers them through the right to production of knowledge. In the network society, through social media, everyone has the possibility to put out information, create knowledge and highlight relevant issues. The power of production has thus shifted from media corporations, or political and economic agendas, to the people. Viewed through the lenses of the participatory paradigm, this increases the chances for social change considerably, as people become the agents of their own society.

A point related to this, which is often debated in the context of social media, is the risk of the creation of false and incorrect information, if everyone has access to the production. Especially in relation to Wiki-pages, which are completely based on the knowledge of users, is it argued that this might lead to wrong information. But just as in the time of the print revolution, where incorrect information was corrected quickly due to a much wider distribution of the information and a much greater heterogeneity of readers[54], this is not a problem today[55]. The knowledge watchdog function of the public was started already at the time of the print revolution, and has now been extended to not just watch, but also to act upon false information and thereby set agendas.

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[51]Eisenstein, p.97
[52]Ibid. p.98
[53]Ibid., p. 34
[54]Ibid. p. 49
[55]Anderson, p. 69

In discussions about social media, democratisation is often mentioned. Eisenstein again points to this in the print revolution, where printing workshops were the meeting place for readers, printers, priests, scientists, competitors, craftsmen and editors alike, thus blurring the boundaries between social classes and creating cross-cultural interchange[56]. *"Printing encouraged forms of combinatory activity which were social as well as intellectual"[57]*, i.e. it democratised (to some extend) society. Social media follows in the footsteps of this trend and enforces them through the low entry barriers and costs[58] of social media tools.

In this context a critical limitation to the analysis of the effects of print and social media should be given. Printing affected the literate elites, and even though Eisenstein argues, that literacy increased drastically in the centuries after printing emerged, the major share of society continued to be illiterate. Social media similarly is based on internet access, and measures its own effects mainly in a global context, where there exists a major digital divide: Between countries in general and between different groups and layers of societies nationally[59].

In summary, Eisenstein sets out to highlight *"how access to greater abundance ...of written records* (knowledge) *affected ways of learning, thinking and perceiving"[60]* in the print revolution, thus successfully showing the long-term effects on society. Social media and the Internet constitute another communication revolution, and the comparison should therefore highlight in what ways social media can influence society and therefore cause social change. Print and social media share the common traits that they affect the way people accumulate knowledge and deal with this knowledge. Social media offers a better tool for dealing with this knowledge than print did, as interactivity and dialogue are added to the advancements of print. Innovation is spurred and awareness about possibilities and opportunities in society is created, an empowerment, which can lead to social movements and change. Power relations are inherently also challenged and changed through this, which is for example shown by the huge focus on social media strategies of companies today, which try to become part of the social media trend, or by the attempt of many governments at controlling citizen access to social media.

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[56]Eisenstein, p.49
[57]Ibid.
[58]Pole, p.4
[59]Castells, 2001, p.249
[60]p. 18

3.0 Examination – the practical dimension

3.1 Weak & strong ties

A range of social movements in the last years, most recently the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have been called "social media revolutions" ("Facebook revolution", "Twitter revolution") and has been hailed as the advent of a new way to social change. One of the most lasting critics of this interpretation is the writer Malcolm Gladwell, who in his article in the New Yorker argues that social change demands strong ties between participants, as challenging the status quo is a high-risk activity[61]. Instead of fostering strong-ties between people, social media creates weak-ties and low-cost participation that does not pose any risk to the participant[62], Gladwell continues. Clicking a "like"-button on Facebook, forwarding an email or even visiting the "We are all Khaled Said" web page gives people a sense of being active, whilst there is very little risk – or consequence - of their action (Gladwell in fact argues, it should not be called action at all). In continuation of this it can be argued that social media actually impedes social activism by giving a false feeling of involvement; a topic discussed at more length further below.

While it is fairly easy to agree that weak ties will not lead directly to radical social change campaigns, the importance of weak ties should not be underestimated. Alexis Madrigal emphasises the relevance of his manifold ties on Twitter, which allow him to be exposed to great amounts of information and in many cases also lead to strong ties. *"What Twitter lacks in corporeal contact, I think it makes up in longevity"[63]*, Madrigal says, highlighting the potential of interactive social media to create ties that matter to the participant.

3.2 Coordination & organisation

The famous Netville-study, which compared Internet users with non-users in the suburb of Netville, Canada, makes a similar point. The study showed that *"users of the Internet were found to have a higher number of strong social ties, of weak ties and of knowing ties within the suburb*

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[61]Gladwell, *"Small change"*, p.44
[62] Ibid., p.46
[63] Madrigal

and outside the suburb"[64]. Engaging in networks on the Internet thus fosters social relationships as much as increased knowledge levels, making Gladwell´s point debatable. But even accepting the concept of weak tie organisation, it becomes clear that social media therefore should not be dismissed as useless for the purpose of social change. Social change needs motivated, courageous citizens, but it also needs tools for knowledge sharing and coordination. The weak ties of social media create far reaching networks, which in turn create fast and efficient reach of dissemination, thus forming important tools for coordination and organisation. These tools can react upon social change, or can be the decisive in enabling social change, which before seemed unattainable. They can help an immediate situation or alter the way society is run. A case in point is the use of Twitter and Facebook in the recent crisis in the city of Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Due to on-going fights over the presidency the city suffers from chaos and an environment that makes it impossible to venture outside in the streets. One Twitter user started using his personal network to ask for help otherwise made impossible, such as providing medicine, arranging transport, information about water supplies or casualties[65]. The idea soon grew to include more people online and is said to also help people without access to the Internet, as they can contact a neighbour etc. with Internet and get help through them. In that way social media here provides a system of self-help through enabling communication. Even though this is not an example of radical change, it constitutes a way to empower the citizen of the Ivory Coast by making them independent from the actions of the government. Ultimately this constitutes a threat to authorities, as they lose a way to control their citizens. So even in this example social media has the potential to change the consciousness and actions of citizens. Social media gives the people the opportunity to become the citizen, which the participatory paradigm argues, should take matters in their hands.

3.3 Network structure

Gladwell´s arguments point out important considerations about the use of social media for social change, but he neglects to recognise the fundamental effects of the network society on personal organisation. *"The emergence of a new system of social relationships centered on the*

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[64]In: Castells 2001, p.122
[65] http://storyful.com/stories/1000002367-twitter-takes-emergency-calls-in-the-ivory-coast

individual[...] embodied in me-centered networks"[66] sets the Internet age apart from earlier forms of organisation. This not only forces us to think differently about the creation of strong ties, which used to be based on family and local communities (clubs, neighbourhood, etc.) and are now constructed around interests and voluntary sociability[67], it also allows for a new structure of action. Gladwell argues in a somewhat conservative view, that a structure based on hierarchies is necessary to reach goals:

> *"Because networks don´t have a centralized leadership structure and clear lines of authority, they have real difficulty reaching consensus and setting goals. They can´t think strategically; they are chronically prone to conflict and error."*[68]

Castells contrasts this with a more complex interpretation of the network society when arguing, that the nature of social movements itself has changed with the arrival of the Internet, which gives it its *"appropriate medium of organization"*[69]. He states that the network organisation

> *"...results in an unprecedented combination of flexibility and task performance, of coordinated decision making and decentralized execution, of individualized expression and global, horizontal communication, which provide a superior organizational form for human action."*[70]

Gladwell and Castells thus have opposing viewpoints, which are hard to disprove. One of the leaders of the Egyptian revolution, Wael Ghonim, provides an example of the structure of a social movement, when describing Egypt´s revolution:

> *"Everyone is contributing content, [but] you don't know the names of the people contributing the content. This is exactly what happened. Everyone contributing small pieces, bits and pieces. We drew this whole picture of a revolution. And no one is the hero in that picture."*[71]

A diverse, flexible and non-hierarchical organisation succeeded in achieving goals. Ghonim´s example provides at the same time evidence for the fact, that decentralised organisations also can take on leadership roles, as Ghonim himself was a guiding figure of the protests[72]. This enables them to act coordinated and strategically. Additionally leadership roles within decentralised networks are not as easily abused, as the network has enough resources to function without the leader.

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[66]Castells, 2001, p. 128
[67]Castells, 2011, p. 128/132
[68]Gladwell, *"Small change"*, p. 48
[69]Castells, 2001, p. 139
[70]Castells, 2001, p. 2
[71] Scola
[72] http://edition.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/02/09/husain.ghonim/

Ghonim also highlights the importance of knowledge, which according to him led to the revolution. Access to information and knowledge is another important element of social change and a central feature of social media. In Egypt information played a crucial role in inducing protests and revolution, and was provided through various outlets, such as the "We Are All Khaled Said" page, blogs, Facebook and Twitter. Similarly Wikileaks has been linked to the revolution in Tunisia, as a diplomatic cable revealing the lifestyle of the then-president Ben Ali is said to have increased the fury of the Tunisian people, i.e. the knowledge of a certain situation was the starting point for interest in social change. On top of that the speed of information dissemination has increased greatly in the new network based communication tools, making reactions more feasible and relevant:

> *"Internet have caused information to move faster across national borders. I´m suggesting the viral effects of uprisings are much faster than formerly. It once would have taken days for anyone in Egypt to find out what happened in Tunisia. Information moved too slowly for the sort of instantaneous reaction we saw this week."[73]*.

A structure of networks, which allowed for knowledge sharing, fast dissemination and coordination of people thus had a crucial impact on the revolution and is a milestone for social change movements. It is however impossible to determine all the cause-effect relationships at work. The role of the Wikileaks cables in Tunisia for example is hard to identify for sure. Did the Wikileaks information reach enough people to be relevant at all? Did the cables in fact provide new and crucial information and thereby caused the desire for social change, or did it confirm well-known facts (which perhaps lay at the heart of the reasons for the revolution)? Considerations such as these make it difficult to argue, that the revolutions clearly were "social media revolutions", because if people were not discouraged, angry, and disappointed, even a video of a young man beat to death would not start a revolution. The opposite is nonetheless just as possible: The revolutions were social media revolutions, as disappointed, desperate people, who had seen a gruesome video only went to the streets, because social media touched, connected or encouraged them to take action. In that vein both the situation in the society and the available social media are a cause for the revolutions.

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[73]Weinstein – comment section

3.4 Practical definitions of social change

The debate about the structure of social movements and the insecurities in pointing out the cause for the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt indicate a general dilemma: The definition of social change. Gladwell and Castells opposing views exemplify this very well. Even though Castells acknowledges that me-centred networks can be prone to low involvement and short term dedication[74], he continues to have a positive outlook on the future of society in an Internet era. Gladwell on the other hand focuses on radical social change and rejects the idea of social media being revolutionary. For social change however both radical actions and the state of society are of relevance.

The definition of what constitutes social change and how pervasive it has to be within society is consequently of importance when looking at the effects of social media on social change. New York University professor Clay Shirky is another proponent of gradual change. His focus is on the long-term aspects of social media within the public sphere:

> *"The potential of social media lies mainly in their support of civil society and the public sphere – change measured in years and decades rather than weeks and months."[75]*

Shirky acknowledges that radical changes are directly linked to social media, but sees these as special cases. In general the power of social media lies in providing people with a more open, free and diverse public sphere, which subsequently transforms the ground that regimes stand on.

Both views uncover a strong bias towards democracy, which runs generally through the literature on social media and social change. Gladwell seems to advocate for radical change that leads (authoritative) societies to democracy, while moderates like Shirky focus on one step towards democracy: The principle of freedom of speech exemplified through social media[76] in the public sphere. A democratic society is understood as the end goal of social change in both cases. Also social change in itself is viewed as a positive phenomenon. The status quo can however be a very desirable situation, either because authoritarian elites fear change, because democracy is not seen as a goal in itself by the people, or because people live in well-functioning democracies, where status quo means the continuation of good living conditions. Within these democracies, radical

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[74]2001, p.132
[75]Shirky, p. 35
[76]Shirky

challenges of the status quo are not possible because the end goal, democracy is already achieved and only the structure of democracy can be changed. Uncovering these assumptions, two things emerge: Social media is a highly political tool, closely linked to ideology[77]. Secondly a broader perspective on social change is necessary, if it is to embrace all (or at least more) possible forms of progression within societies. This also gives a new understanding to the inconsequential social media use of the West:

> *"...most fascinating is the contrast between oppressed peoples posts and tweets with the apathetic, complacent, trivial and entitled posts of the west."[78]*

Democracies do not have the same need for expressing themselves, as they do not need to challenge the status quo. Changes usually affect certain groups of people only. Antoinette Pole gives examples of this in her analysis of political blogging

> *"Similarly, LGTB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) political bloggers successfully mobilized around gay marriage [...] asking their readers to sign petitions and to vote against state referenda".[79]*

Gaining the right to marriage does not demand the same courage as starting a revolution in Iran, but it nonetheless goes to the core of people´s life and society´s rules. Trivial social media use, social change and democracy can thus be different aspects of the same thing

Ultimately Pole concludes her study arguing, that blogging has transformed the entire political landscape in the United States[80] as citizens take control of their environment by setting the agenda and calling for action in a range of small, individual cases of politics.

3.5 Social media as a tool of oppression

Jodi Dean does not only not recognise the potential of social media in fostering social action and political dissident, she also argues that the Internet and social media work against citizen engagement and real social change. Her argument is that the myriads of ideas and networks, the

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[77]Linking a universal tool to ideology and countries (foremost the US) brings the danger of distorting the medium´s effects due to this ideology. As Mozorov argues in "The Net Delusion", in a number of cases social media is already viewed as an instrument of Western power .

[78]Gladwell – comment section, *"Does Egypt need Twitter"*

[79]Pole, p.136

[80]Ibid. p. 1

ideals of participation and information access undermine political opportunity and citizen engagement[81], because communication has grown to be a factor of existence, not meaning. *"Messages are contributions to circulating content - not actions to elicit responses."*[82] The two main reasons for this limited concept of communication are according to Dean the fantasy of abundance and the fantasy of participation – two concepts which are usually acknowledged as the most positive characteristics of social media by other scholars. The fantasy of abundance breaks with the common understanding, that the sheer abundance of information and messages automatically indicates increased democratic potential[83]. On the contrary, the abundance of information, viewpoints and messages circulating means, that being there is everything, while responses are not expected or necessary. This ultimately means that societies on the surface deal with a lot of issues and grievances, but effectively do not act upon them. Dean gives the example of President Bush, who never actually acted upon anti-war propaganda. Giving citizens the opportunity to voice their concerns and contribute in the mix of messages, made it possible for the President to not actually react on them and still stand as a democratic, freedom-loving leader. Citizens are thus participating in society – or at least they feel they are, Dean explains. The fantasy of participation shows, that people participate in this inert mix of communication, because it enables them to be relieved from their guilt of not doing their part and allows them to feel like informed, engaged citizens after all[84]. Under these premises real politicisation of issues becomes harder, as they are covered up by a technology that promises more than it offers. *"Even as globally networked communications provide tools and terrains of struggle, they make political change more difficult"*[85]. Social media is thus politicised in society as the tool to democracy, freedom of speech and social change, which has the effect of actually decreasing real participation and risk-taking.

Dean´s interpretation must ultimately mean, that ties created in this communication arena are weak ties, as participants never expect a real response or dedication to the cause. User-generated pages such as Wikileaks are rendered meaningless as well or even an impediment to change, as

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[81]Dean, p. 104
[82]Ibid., p. 107
[83]Ibid.
[84]Ibid., p. 111
[85]Ibid., p.119

their information contribution is based on a wish of participation, but not a dedication to do something about highlighted issues.

Wikileaks in this context also exemplifies another dimension of the politicisation of social media. One of the few direct effects of the Wikileaks cables was the resignation of the US ambassador to Mexico[86]. Wikileaks had published a diplomatic cable from the ambassador, which put the Mexican government in a bad light. The subsequent demand of the President of Mexico for the resignation of the ambassador leaves room for the question, if this was a reaction to the truth of the cables (bad diplomatic practice) or using Wikileaks as a chance to accomplish political goals. Social media has to elicit a political reaction to be effective in relation to social change, but it can be misused by either covering up any political reaction or by politicising the medium itself.

Another impediment to the positive effects of social media on social change stems from its use in authoritarian regimes. In the book "The Net Delusion" the journalist Evgeny Morozov draws attention to how social media can be misused:

> *"...how useful it would prove for propaganda purposes, how masterfully dictators would learn to use it for surveillance and how sophisticated modern systems of internet censorship would become."[87]*

Here social media does not create a public sphere that is the market place of ideas and plans, but a public sphere that is centred around surveillance and oppression, effectively decreasing the citizens´ ability to participate in the design of the society. Positive political change, such as democratisation, follows the development of a public sphere[88]. But as social media unfolds its greatest benefits in already existing public spheres, where people are trained at forming and communicating an opinion, the usefulness of social media in truly autocratic states can be doubted. In these cases social media needs to be a tool to establish the public sphere. This is not only very difficult, but can also be highly dangerous for citizens engaging in this new form of public action. In conclusion social media can still play a role in creating a strong civil society, but comes with clear dangers and struggles like any other media form.

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[86]http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/20/us-ambassador-mexico-resigns-wikileaks?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487
[87]Morozov, p. 29
[88]Shirky

3.6 Power & knowledge

The ambivalence of social media is a consistent theme, which also Gaventa and Cornwall touch upon in their analysis of the relation between power and knowledge within a participatory framework. In their article different interpretations of power through knowledge are presented, and the relevance of participation highlighted.

Power is not just the ability to decide over someone on a certain issue, but extends to the ability to *"organize some issues into politics, whilst others are organized out"*[89]. Power is here a question of attention and agenda setting, and highly relevant for creating diverse, free societies. Ultimately in this dimension power is challenged through broadened knowledge production, which challenges political boundaries. But power can go on to function on a deeper, less visible level. Power can be the ability to form the subconscious framing of our world: Which grievances are recognised as such, and which are not[90]. This is achieved through education, media and information control. Certainly this is an area where social media can play an important role, while at the same time it is difficult to create effective change, as it demands that the users engaging in user-controlled communication free themselves from this learned consciousness. The different levels of power, which limit the knowledge of citizens, highlight the importance of both knowledge as a resource to deal with issues, and the importance of the right to the production of knowledge. Social media can through its participatory, interactive character open so called *"spaces for change"*[91], which act on the knowledge and power balance. The Wikileaks cables are an example of social media creating such knowledge about issues (diplomatic behaviour) that before was organised out of the political and public agenda. The ambivalence created by this however, is the need for resources to fill these spaces[92] otherwise no change will result from it. Social media has the ability to fill these spaces through establishing relations and coordination, but does not automatically do so. On the contrary, in many cases it can be argued that social media just highlights, and then dies out without any real consequence. (The Wikileaks Iraq cables e.g. had close to no consequence or public (re)action.) In Tunisia and Egypt the power balance was changed through Facebook and blogs, which gave away otherwise excluded

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[89]Gaventa & Cornwall, p.71
[90]Ibid.
[91]Ibid., p.78
[92]Ibid., p.78

knowledge, but it seems that it was the fury and enraged feelings of the people, that acted to fill the opened space and bring people out on the streets to challenge the status quo.

Social media thus has the power to change society, but needs to be understood in the framework of every societies capabilities as to be successful.

3.7 Conclusion

The different cases of social change and social media accounted for in this section most of all highlight the ambiguous character of social media. It seems impossible to assert for sure if social media is a tool used in an existing case of social change or a catalyst that ignites situations, which have been smouldering under the surface.

Information flow and speed of dissemination, knowledge production and knowledge sharing are clearly enhanced through social media. Ultimately the characteristics of the public sphere are altered, though there is disagreement about in what direction. Proponents argue that the participation of citizens in knowledge production leads to more equal power relations and thereby a possibility to change society. Opponents on the other hand argue that social media reduces participation and response in the public sphere to an inconsequential farce. Activism in social media is more a form of entertainment than dedication[93],this sentiment summarises.

The network structure of social media is also ambivalent, as it can foster both weak ties and strong ties, which have very different consequences for social change. The flexibility of networks brings crucial advantages for the organisation of social movements, but can be threatened by the lack of hierarchy. It appears however that this so far has not been a problem in cases of social change, as oftentimes a leader with confined rights emerges within these networks. Finally, the debate about social media is characterised by political assumptions and considerations. While the theoretical foundation is positioned around democracy, social media as a communication medium is politicised. Every consideration about the effects of social media thus needs to be seen in the context of the societal, political and individual situation.

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[93]Baskin

4.0 Conclusion

This paper asks more questions than it provides answers. Even though that robs us of a straight-forward solution to the question, it makes clear the complexity of the phenomenon of social media, which is characterised by a myriad of divergent viewpoints.

It does become clear from the cases however, that social media does not cause social change. Social change requires people, and serious grievances. But in many cases social media functions as a tool for social change, as it enables knowledge sharing, information dissemination and coordination, making it easier to organise social movements. On top of that it can be argued that social media also functions as a catalyst for social change, i.e. in conjunction with true grievances it causes social change. The possibilities inherent in social media open spaces for engagement and action for people, which were not available before, causing them to see opportunities for social change.

Most important of all are the long-term effects of social media however. The print revolution did not topple all elites within society, and illiterates stayed illiterate for a long time, but the development of printing nevertheless lead to more democratic societies, in which the foundation for citizens interaction and engagement was altered. One of social media´s primary functions is in that same space, the public sphere; enabling and empowering citizens. The net effects of this are hard to determine at this point in time, but examples point towards a transformation of societies in direction of democratic values and an ever more equal structure of existing democracies.

The democratic bias in literature on social change and social media is overwhelming, and even though I agree with democracy being a goal for societies, social media will have to be looked at from outside that framework to be understood thoroughly. Due to the complexity of the field a range of further research also should and could be undertaken: Policy making in relation to social media is relevant in relation to the effects of social media. Field research in cases of social change (e.g. Tunisia, Egypt, etc.) could help to understand cause-effect relationships in detail. Finally social media effects on social change can be looked at through different lenses, such as the modernisation or marked-driven paradigm of social change. Social media is here and in most literature viewed as participatory, thus being a natural component of the participatory approach

to social change. In how far participation in social media fosters real relations, dedication and political consequences is however another point debated greatly. Yet there is strong indication that social media can be the foundation of both strong-tie relations and serve as entertainment purposes at the same time, where the two do not have to be mutually exclusive. Social media reacts on the needs and wishes of citizens, making social media clearly depend on the societal environment, which is the foundation for these wishes and needs. What is generally true of social media is that its role is *"to empower people through the construction of their own knowledge, in a process of action and reflection, or conscientization"*[94] In other words, social media broadens access to reality, as people can now contribute to the construction of their own reality.

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[94]Gaventa & Cornwall, p.73

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Appendix 1:

The Tunisian Revolution

A) Simplified Timeline of the Revolution:

December 17: Mohammed Bouazizi, an 26-year-old man trying to support his family by selling fruits and vegetables in the central town of Sidi Bouzid, douses himself in paint thinner and sets himself on fire in front of a local municipal office.

Police had confiscated his produce cart because he lacked a permit and beat him up when he resisted. Local officials then refused to hear his complaint. He is taken to a hospital near Tunis for treatment of his third-degree burns.

Bouazizi's act of desperation highlights the public's boiling frustration over living standards, police violence, rampant unemployment, and a lack of human rights. The protests begin in Sidi Bouzid that same day. They quickly spread across the region, then the country.

December 28: Ben Ali visits Bouazizi in the hospital in an attempt to calm the protests. The protests continue and spread throughout the country however. On the 4th of January Bouazizi dies of his injuries.

January 14: Ben Ali imposes a state of emergency and fires the country's government amid violent clashes between protesters and security forces. He promises fresh legislative elections within six months in an attempt to quell mass dissent. Later that evening Ben Ali flees the country. Mohammed Ghannouchi, the prime minister, appears on state television to announce that he is assuming the role of interim president under chapter 56 of the Tunisian constitution.

January 18: Unhappy with the lineup of the new government, Tunisians again take to the streets in protest. Ghannouchi and Mebazaa resign from the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) in a bid to placate protesters.

January 20: All ministers in the interim government quit Ben Ali's RCD party but remain in their cabinet posts. The central committee of RCD is dissolved, as many of the ministers were also committee members.

January 21: The first of a three-day period of national mourning sees protesters gather peacefully throughout the day in Tunis. They demand the dissolution of the new government as they honour those who died in the unrest of previous weeks.

January 22: Thousands of protesters take to the streets yet again, continuing to ask for the removal of all RCD members from the interim government.
Around 2,000 police officers join the civilian protesters, calling for better working conditions and a new union and complaining about their association with Ben Ali's repressive regime.

January 27: Ghannouchi resigns as prime minister after continuous protests. New elections are announced for June 2011.

B) Comments on the use of the Internet in the revolution:

Shortly after the beginning of the protests, the Tunisian government aggressively started to take control of the Internet. A wide range of web pages such as YouTube were shut down, while protesters had to fear hacking of their passwords and web pages, were arrested and beaten.

Al Jazeera English reports accordingly:

On December 17, he and Ali Bouazizi, a cousin of Mohamed Bouazizi, posted a video of a peaceful protest led by the young man's mother outside the municipality building. That evening, the video was aired on Al Jazeera's Mubasher channel. Al Jazeera's new media team, which trawls the web looking for video from across the Arab world, had picked up the footage via Facebook. Tunisian media, in contrast, ignored the growing uprising until Nessma TV broke the silence on December 29. And aside from a solid core of activists, most Tunisians did not dare repost the videos on Facebook or even to "like" them, until president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's final hours. Yet even if a muted majority did not actively share news of the protests online until mid-January, Tunisia's 3.6 million internet users - a third of the population, one of the highest penetration rates on the African continent, according to Internet World Stats - were able to follow news of the uprising on social media thanks to a solid core of activists. Throughout the uprising, Tunisian protesters relied on Facebook to communicate with each other. Facebook, unlike most video sharing sites, was not included in Tunisia's online censorship. Non-internet users kept abreast of the protests via satellite news channels including Al Jazeera, France 24 and, playing catch-up on its competitors, Al Arabiya.
Anonymous, the loosely-knit group of international web activists that drew world attention for their "distributed denial of service" (DDoS) attacks on the servers of companies that blocked payments and server access to the whistle-blowing website, WikiLeaks, joined the fray, in solidarity with the Tunisian uprising. Similar hacktivist groups built applications that could circumvent the censorship of web pages and make them again accessible for every one.

Based on:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunisian_revolution#Repercussion_analysis
http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/spotlight/tunisia/2011/01/201114142223827361.html
http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/01/tunisia/all/1
http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/01/2011614145839362.html

The Egyptian Revolution

A) Simplified Timeline of the Revolution

January 2011: Activists in Egypt call for an uprising in their own country, to protest against poverty, unemployment, government corruption and the rule of president Hosni Mubarak, who has been in power for three decades. News about the Tunisian Revolution are said to have fuelled the Egyptian protests.

January 25: On a national holiday to commemorate the police forces, Egyptians take to the streets in large numbers, calling it a "day of rage".
Thousands march in downtown Cairo. Similar protests are reported in other towns across the country. After a few hours of relative calm, police and demonstrators clash; police fire tear gas and use water cannons against demonstrators crying out "Down with Mubarak" in Cairo's main Tahrir Square.
Protests break out in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, the Nile Delta cities of Mansura and Tanta and in the southern cities of Aswan and Assiut, and grow in the following days.
Facebook, Twitter and Blackberry Messenger services are disrupted.

January 27: Activist Wael Ghonim disappears during the nationwide unrest. Ghonim had been running a Facebook fan page about Mohamed ElBaradei, which was being used to promote democracy and organize protests in Cairo.

January 28: Internet and mobile phone text message users in Egypt report major disruption to services as the country prepares for a new wave of protests after Friday prayers.

January 29: In a speech delivered shortly after midnight, Mubarak announces that he has sacked the cabinet, but he himself refuses to step down. His whereabouts are unknown.

January 31: Mubarak still refuses to step down, amid growing calls for his resignation. Protesters continue to defy the military-imposed curfew.
Internet access across Egypt is still shoddy according to most reports. Google improves its speak2tweet technology for the people in Egypt.

February 1: Hosni Mubarak announces in a televised address that he will not run for re-election but refuses to step down from office - the central demand of the protesters.
Mubarak promises reforms to the constitution, particularly Article 76, which makes it virtually impossible for independent candidates to run for office.

February 7: Wael Ghonim, a Google executive and political activist arrested by state authorities, is released; some see him as a potential figurehead for the pro-democracy camp.

February 11: After tens of thousands people take to the streets across Egypt in angry protests, Hosni Mubarak resigns as president and hands over power to the army.

B) Comments on the use of the Internet in the revolution:

According to a report from the U.S. Embassy in Egypt, police brutality has been common and widespread in Egypt. In the last five years, the Mubarak regime has denied the existence of torture or abuse carried out by the police. With the case of Khaled Said gaining increasing public attention, this fuelled the revolutions.

The New York Times reports:

 Mr. Said, a 28-year-old Egyptian businessman, was pulled from an Internet cafe in Alexandria last June by two plainclothes police officers, who witnesses say then beat him to death in the lobby of a residential building. Human rights advocates said he was killed because he had evidence of police corruption.
The Egyptian police and security services have a well-earned reputation for brutality and snuffing out political opposition. But in Mr. Said, they unwittingly chose the wrong target. Within five days of his death, an anonymous human rights activist created a Facebook page — We Are All Khaled Said — that posted cell phone photos from the morgue of his battered and bloodied face, and YouTube videos played up contrasting pictures of him happy and smiling with the graphic images from the morgue. By mid-June, 130,000 people joined the page to get and share updates about the case.
It became and remains the biggest dissident Facebook page in Egypt, even as protests continue to sweep the country, with more than 473,000 users, and it has helped spread the word about the demonstrations in Egypt, which were ignited after a revolt in neighboring Tunisia toppled the government there.
"There were many catalysts of the uprising," said Ahmed Zidan, an online political activist marching toward Tahrir Square for a protest last week. "The first was the brutal murder of Khalid Said."
But Mr. Said's death may be the starkest example yet of the special power of social networking tools like Facebook even — or especially — in a police state. The Facebook page set up around his death offered Egyptians a rare forum to bond over their outrage about government abuses.

"Prior to the murder of Khaled Said, there were blogs and YouTube videos that existed about police torture, but there wasn't a strong community around them," said Jillian C. York, the project coordinator for the OpenNet Initiative of the Berkman Center for the Internet and Society at Harvard University. "This case changed that."

Based on:
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/world/middleeast/06face.html
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Egyptian_revolution#Background
http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html

Appendix 2: Blogs

Madrigal

Gladwell on Social Media and Activism

By Alexis Madrigal

I really like Malcolm Gladwell's new piece on digital political organizing.
It's got an excellent structure, alternating scenes of the lunch counter protests of the 1960s with ideas about the loose social groups that activists attempt to catalyze on Facebook and Twitter. His big point is weak-tie networks don't have the dedication and structure to take on an established power structure. Martin Luther King, Jr, he notes, had a one million dollar budget and 100 staff members on the ground when he got to Birmingham.

I found myself surprised at how much I liked the piece. I'm a big fan of Clay Shirky, whose various writings about the potential of the Internet as an organizing platform would seem to run directly contrary to Gladwell's thesis.
Certainly, the strong form of his argument -- that Twitter and Facebook make it harder to organize -- seems unsupported (at least in this article). But I can get behind a weaker form of the idea. Communication technologies are often lauded as the key to unlock our societal shackles even if they actually reinforce existing power structures -- and Gladwell does an excellent job pointing that out. So, I think we can read Gladwell's piece as a fairly specific indictment of the current uses of the current generation of tools. Truth is, very few major activism projects succeed through Facebook or Twitter. Shirky would totally agree with that, I think. And in cases where they seem to have helped, it's quite difficult to quantify how much, if at all. The explicit compare-and-contrast with Birmingham and the broader civil rights movement throws the possibility that we're diminishing and deracinating activism into stark relief, and I think that's a good thing. But there are two threads of his story, in particular, that leave a lot to be desired.

First, a smaller quibble. Gladwell defines Twitter like this, "The platforms of social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met." But the thing about Twitter, at least for me, is that I *end up* meeting the people that I interact with most closely. Twitter acts as a kind of human recommendation engine in which I am the algorithm. In person, I've met Clay Shirky himself, Tim Maly, Robin Sloan, and at least 10 more -- and I've edited dozens of folks that I know exclusively through the service. What Twitter lacks in corporeal contact, I think it makes up in longevity. I've been watching some people's minds work on the service for years. Every day I see their faces in my feed. To label these weak ties is just inaccurate. And it makes me wonder, can't we know people through their writing? Is face-to-face contact the only way to build strong ties?
University of Maryland-Baltimore sociologist Zeynep Tufecki also points out that, as in my case, lots of weak ties beget some strong ties.
"The relationship between weak and strong ties is one of complementarity and support, not one of opposition. Gladwell has written about weak and strong ties before and continues a tradition of contrasting them as ontological opposites, somehow opposing and displacing each other," Tufecki writes on her blog Technosociology. "That is a widespread conceptual error and rests

upon an inadequate understanding of these concepts. Large pools of weaker ties are crucial to being able to build robust networks of stronger ties -- and Internet use is a key to this process." Second, the most serious overextension of the argument is that "networks" don't have leadership or organization. Gladwell writes:

Because networks don't have a centralized leadership structure and clear lines of authority, they have real difficulty reaching consensus and setting goals. They can't think strategically; they are chronically prone to conflict and error. How do you make difficult choices about tactics or strategy or philosophical direction when everyone has an equal say?

This feels thin. Sure, Facebook and Twitter don't have lines of authority per se, but they are not the entire universe of social enterprises online. What about Linux development? Or mathematical problem solving at MathOverflow? Or the Obama campaign's efforts? Or all the little social spaces online where people come together to push for an idea or a project, like Greater Greater Washington? To distill, who says online social networks can't have leadership, strategy, and clear lines of authority? Even if we said that no current effort rises to the level of a sit-in, I wouldn't bet against powerful movements developing through social media over the next decade. People are still learning how to organize online. The tools are new. But perhaps what we can take from Gladwell's piece is that we need a little more bravery and dedication to go with our whiz and bang new stuff.

Thanks to Zack Sherwood for the pointer to Tufecki's work.

http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/09/gladwell-on-social-media-and-activism/63623/

Gladwell

February 2, 2011

Does Egypt Need Twitter?

Posted by Malcolm Gladwell

When Mao famously said that power springs from the barrel of a gun, it was assumed that he was talking about guns. There wasn't much interest at the time in how he chose to communicate that sentiment: whether he said it in a speech, say, or whispered it to a friend, or wrote it in his diary or published it in a book. That would never happen today, of course. We now believe that the "how" of a communicative act is of huge importance. We would say that Mao posted that power comes from the barrel of a gun on his Facebook page, or we would say that he blogged about gun barrels on Tumblr—and eventually, as the apostles of new media wrestled with the implications of his comments, the verb would come to completely overcome the noun, the part about the gun would be forgotten, and the the big takeaway would be: Whoa. Did you see what Mao just tweeted?

Right now there are protests in Egypt that look like they might bring down the government. There are a thousand important things that can be said about their origins and implications: as I wrote last fall in The New Yorker, "high risk" social activism requires deep roots and strong ties. But surely the least interesting fact about them is that some of the protesters may (or may not) have at one point or another employed some of the tools of the new media to communicate with one another. Please. People protested and brought down governments before Facebook was invented. They did it before the Internet came along. Barely anyone in East Germany in the nineteen-eighties had a phone—and they ended up with hundreds of thousands of people in central Leipzig and brought down a regime that we all thought would last another hundred years—and in the French Revolution the crowd in the streets spoke to one another with that strange, today largely unknown instrument known as the human voice. People with a grievance will always find ways to communicate with each other. How they choose to do it is less interesting, in the end, than why they were driven to do it in the first place.

Read more http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/02/does-egypt-need-twitter.html?printable=true&currentPage=all#ixzz1L6ajmH6C

Gladwell & Shirky

March/April 2011

RESPONSE

From Innovation to Revolution

Do Social Media Make Protests Possible?

Malcolm Gladwell and Clay Shirky

AN ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE
Malcolm Gladwell

While reading Clay Shirky's "The Political Power of Social Media" (January/February 2011), I was reminded of a trip I took just over ten years ago, during the dot-com bubble. I went to the catalog clothier Lands' End in Wisconsin, determined to write about how the rise of the Internet and e-commerce was transforming retail. What I learned was that it was not. Having a Web site, I was told, was definitely an improvement over being dependent entirely on a paper catalog and a phone bank. But it was not a life-changing event. After all, taking someone's order over the phone is not that much harder than taking it over the Internet. The innovations that companies such as Lands' End really cared about were bar codes and overnight delivery, which utterly revolutionized the back ends of their businesses and which had happened a good ten to 15 years previously.

The lesson here is that just because innovations in communications technology happen does not mean that they matter; or, to put it another way, in order for an innovation to make a real difference, it has to solve a problem that was actually a problem in the first place. This is the question that I kept wondering about throughout Shirky's essay-and that had motivated my *New Yorker* **article** on social media, to which Shirky refers: What evidence is there that social revolutions in the pre-Internet era suffered from a lack of cutting-edge communications and organizational tools? In other words, did social media solve a problem that actually needed solving? Shirky does a good job of showing how some recent protests have used the tools of social media. But for his argument to be anything close to persuasive, he has to convince readers that in the absence of social media, those uprisings would not have been possible.

MALCOLM GLADWELL is a Staff Writer for *The New Yorker.*

SHIRKY REPLIES

Malcolm Gladwell's commercial comparison is illustrative. If you look at the way the Internet has affected businesses such as Lands' End, you will indeed conclude that not much has changed, but that is because you are looking at the wrong thing. The effect of the Internet on traditional

businesses is less about altering internal practices than about altering the competitive landscape: clothing firms now have to compete with Zappos, bookstores with Amazon, newspapers with Craigslist, and so on.

The competitive landscape gets altered because the Internet allows insurgents to play by different rules than incumbents. (Curiously, the importance of this difference is best explained by Gladwell himself, in his 2009 *New Yorker* **essay** "How David Beats Goliath.") So I would break Gladwell's question of whether social media solved a problem that actually needed solving into two parts: Do social media allow insurgents to adopt new strategies? And have those strategies ever been crucial? Here, the historical record of the last decade is unambiguous: yes, and yes.

Digital networks have acted as a massive positive supply shock to the cost and spread of information, to the ease and range of public speech by citizens, and to the speed and scale of group coordination. As Gladwell has noted elsewhere, these changes do not allow otherwise uncommitted groups to take effective political action. They do, however, allow committed groups to play by new rules.

It would be impossible to tell the story of Philippine President Joseph Estrada's 2000 downfall without talking about how texting allowed Filipinos to coordinate at a speed and on a scale not available with other media. Similarly, the supporters of Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero used text messaging to coordinate the 2004 ouster of the People's Party in four days; anticommunist Moldovans used social media in 2009 to turn out 20,000 protesters in just 36 hours; the South Koreans who rallied against beef imports in 2008 took their grievances directly to the public, sharing text, photos, and video online, without needing permission from the state or help from professional media. Chinese anticorruption protesters use the instant-messaging service QQ the same way today. All these actions relied on the power of social media to synchronize the behavior of groups quickly, cheaply, and publicly, in ways that were unavailable as recently as a decade ago.

As I noted in my original essay, this does not mean insurgents always prevail. Both the Green Movement and the Red Shirt protesters used novel strategies to organize, but the willingness of the Iranian and Thai governments to kill their own citizens proved an adequate defense of the status quo. Given the increased vigor of state reaction in the world today, it is not clear what new equilibriums between states and their citizens will look like. (I believe that, as with the printing press, the current changes will result in a net improvement for democracy; the scholars Evgeny Morozov and Rebecca MacKinnon, among others, dispute this view.)

Even the increased sophistication and force of state reaction, however, underline the basic point: these tools alter the dynamics of the public sphere. Where the state prevails, it is only by reacting to citizens' ability to be more publicly vocal and to coordinate more rapidly and on a larger scale than before these tools existed.

CLAY SHIRKY is Professor of New Media at New York University and the author of *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*.

Weinstein

Malcolm Gladwell Tackles Egypt, Twitter

Think social media is democratizing Cairo? Think again, says The New Yorker's reporter.

By Adam Weinstein | Wed Feb. 2, 2011 5:29 PM PST

I don't say this very often, or at all, but Malcolm Gladwell is totally on the money today. Twitter bears about as much responsibility for the Egyptian uprising as George Soros, Mrs. O'Leary's cow, and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Yet in their determination to find a story line—an overarching narrative—to the Mideast's tumult, too many journalists and pedants are overstating the role of the 140-Character Canon in shaping human events. In doing so, they sound as navel-gazingly and lazily conspiratorial as a horde of Glenn Beck evangelists. Anyone who lived through 1989 or the civil rights era or 1967 or 1956 knows that media technology is not a motive force for civil disobedience. Arguing otherwise is not just silly; it's a distraction from the real human forces at play here.

But no one can say it better than Gladwell:

Right now there are protests in Egypt that look like they might bring down the government. There are a thousand important things that can be said about their origins and implications: as I wrote last summer in The New Yorker [3], "high risk" social activism requires deep roots and strong ties. But surely the least interesting fact about them is that some of the protesters may (or may not) have at one point or another employed some of the tools of the new media to communicate with one another. Please. People protested and brought down governments before Facebook was invented. They did it before the Internet came along. Barely anyone in East Germany in the nineteen-eighties had a phone—and they ended up with hundreds of thousands of people in central Leipzig and brought down a regime that we all thought would last another hundred years—and in the French Revolution the crowd in the streets spoke to one another with that strange, today largely unknown instrument known as the human voice. People with a grievance will always find ways to communicate with each other. How they choose to do it is less interesting, in the end, than why they were driven to do it in the first place.

Source URL: http://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/02/malcolm-gladwell-tackles-egypt-twitter

Comments:
● As a reader, I find the how question to be very interesting. There are elements of that part of the story that are rarely covered. Though the new thread of late creates a false dichotomy. People coordinating activity via their mobile device/Twitter connection to a thousand people at once is incredible. People standing up to an autocratic regime is also incredible. People facing down bullies and guns for their freedom, also pretty incredible. This is not a zero sum game, so commentary that trivializes the manner in which people choose to communicate from writers like Gladwell, and from publications like Mother Jones, seems petty, rather than enlightening. Has anyone ever tried talking to people in these movements who use these forms of communication why they choose this method to communicate, instead of utilizing a carrier pigeon?

● *g. powell* ⭐02/02/2011 06:23 PM

Saw a little segment on al-Jazeera this weekend, where somebody pointed out that good-old-fashioned football fan clubs had a lot to do with the uprising. Modeled after the European ultras, there groups can organize a lot of urban young men quickly, they have fought cops at football matches, and they put on big pyrotechnic displays -- all skills that could come in useful in an uprising

● *Cassandra of Troy* ⭐02/02/2011 07:40 PM

Egypt has been a military dictatorship since its inception ages ago and I find it very amusing to hear of demands, expectations and guarantees of Democracy.

● *Cherie* ⭐02/02/2011 08:01 PM

a friend of mine wrote a similar yet better piece a couple of days ago. Surprisingly this is not a novel way of looking at it.

● *Trey* ⭐02/02/2011 08:34 PM

I am reminded of the end of the reign of Pepi II. Those who worship mob rule as "democracy" and forget the turbulence of 2184 B.C. are doomed to repeat it.

● *webcelt* ⭐02/03/2011 09:54 AM

It looks like the effect of new media or the internet at all in organizing opposition is a wash. There are new tools for organizing, but the government can use these tools for tracking opponents too. Grievances didn't suddenly spring up due to new communication tools. It's harder to communicate only face to face, but it's harder for the government to find out who is saying what too.
However, what I think is being missed is that while these new tools don't cause people to become rebellious and the problems of communication were solved in pre-internet times, even pre-TV times, TV and internet have caused information to move faster across national borders. I'm suggesting the viral effect of uprisings is much faster than formerly. It once would have taken days for anyone in Egypt to find out what happened in Tunisia. Information moved too slowly for the sort of instantaneous reaction we saw this week. Imagine how fast the French Revolution might have happened had Frenchmen been watching the American Revolution on TV and receiving real-time messages from Frenchmen in America rather than having to wait for travelers in America to return and spread word of what happened. The...

● *Sam* ⭐02/06/2011 02:23 PM

This is a familiar story line. Finance/high tech business analysts, programmers etc. want to feel that in their job "they too are revolutionaries". Similarly for people who spend too much time on Facebook staring at their friends' "relationship status" - true militants.

● *ViriGain* ⭐02/07/2011 04:54 AM

Egypt is standing on the verge of marking a red letter day in its history. The world must support Egyptians in getting rid of this corrupt regime.

Solis

Defining Social Media: 2006 – 2010

January 7, 2010

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
- George Santayana, Life of Reason, Reason in Common Sense, 1905

A few years ago, I was part of a dedicated group of people who worked together to establish Social Media as an official stage in the progression of New Media. An evolution that is well documented and a conversation still continues today.

As referenced in the original Social Media Manifesto published in June 2007, "Monologue has given way to dialog."
Before Social Media was officially "Social," several well-known pundits observed the composition of socially-driven ideas and technologies and as such collaborated to help document the landscape and also define and defend Social Media as a legitimate classification for the democratization of publishing and the equalization of influence.
As the category gained momentum, it elicited a series of opposing views and introduced new ideas as the saga unfolded. At the same time, it also opened Pandora's box and consequently invited the very masses it was designed to empower to define Social Media. Years later, the definition and its history as documented in Wikipedia are truly representative of just how much and how little we know and also agree on its definition and its destiny.
The initial entry was submitted to Wikipedia in July of 2006 and since then there have been hundreds of edits and iterations – most of which are inaccurate and misleading.

In June of 2007, I called for evangelists, experts, and visionaries to collaborate on seeking and documenting a simple and functional definition for Social Media. The goal was to establish a common point of departure from which we could convert uncharted paths into navigational waypoints documented through shared experiences. In many ways, we were, and still are, digital cartographers.
After much analysis, hosted conversations, debates, and continued research, a working definition was proposed, and for the most part, continues to guide many practitioners today.

Short Version
Any tool or service that uses the internet to facilitate conversations.

Long Version
Social Media is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers.

The discussion continues, inspiring modified definitions that are both brilliant and sometimes inexact. Perhaps uniting around a common definition is implausible. As Social Media evolves it elicits advocates and experiences as it migrates from the edge of early adoption to the center of

prevalence.

But as it pursues ubiquity, Social Media, as a designation, is largely misunderstood and as such, guides many practitioners away from their true opportunity and purpose. Their social compass is unknowingly misaligned and what should point to true North may in fact, displace their center of principles and values.

Indeed, Social Media was embraced by many and still continues to trend upward today as the methodologies and opportunities linked to it persevere, inspiring optimism and igniting ambition along the way.

However, the moment social media was christened, its path towards coalescence was imminent. Experts predict that as soon as 2010 or 2011, Social Media will simply merge into the ongoing development of New Media to set the stage for what's next. Simply said, Social Media will eventually become "media," representative of an important chapter in its advancement and transformation.

As I shared with Jennifer Leggio in a recent post on ZDNet that collected 2010 predictions exploring the potential ubiquity of Social Media:

2010 will be the year that we save us from ourselves in social media…we will stop drinking from the proverbial fire hose and we will lean on filtering and curation to productively guide our experiences and production and consumption behavior and interaction within each network. 2010 will also be the year that leaders and pioneers stop referring to social media as a distinct category of media as they/we usher in an era of new collective and machine intelligence that improves collaboration and interaction – freeing us to focus on the engagement that engenders long term relationships.

It's not so much what it's called, but what it represents that counts for everything. This is the democratization of information and the equalization of influence. But, in the end, Social Media is only but a chapter in the evolution of New Media and the pages are slowly turning to the future.

Scola

Ghonim: "Our Revolution Is Like Wikipedia"

Nancy Scola | February 14, 2011

Wael Ghonim, the Google executive who was behind the Facebook group that helped catalyze the revolution in Egypt and was later held by Egyptian authorities for 12 days, made an appearance on "60 Minutes" last night, sitting down with Harry Smith. And he seemed as eager as the rest of us to figure out a shorthand way of thinking about what went down in Egypt over the last month.

In a web-only outtake, Ghonim comes up with a easy way of understanding how the contributions of the many could come together into a force capable of triggering the toppling of Hosni Mubarak. Think of the wiki, says Ghonim, referencing that humble collaboratively-edited medium that Ward Cunningham dreamt up way back in 1995, and of its most famous instance: Our revolution is like Wikipedia, okay? Everyone is contributing content, [but] you don't know the names of the people contributing the content. This is exactly what happened. Revolution 2.0 in Egypt was exactly the same. Everyone contributing small pieces, bits and pieces. We drew this whole picture of a revolution. And no one is the hero in that picture.

Of course, as Ghonim tells it, the "Wikipedia Revolution" isn't about a medium at all, but an approach -- a nimbleness that makes use of whatever tools are at hand and whatever interest can be tapped into in the hearts and minds of the people. When Facebook went down after he posted details on the locations of planned protests, says Ghonim, "I had a backup plan." He switched to Google Groups, and then asked people to help spread the information far and wide. "And everyone knew, eventually," Ghonim tells Smith. (So, wait, does that make this an "Email Revolution"? Yes. It must.)

Ghonim has tweeted that he plans a book on "Revolution 2.0." And he's also posted a Google Moderator forum that asks Egyptians to post their hopes and dreams for the country, now that the Mubarak era has ended. So is this a "Google Moderator Reconstruction" of Egypt? Stay tuned.