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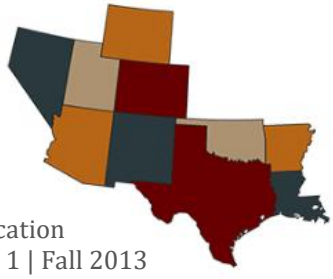

Revolution 2.0: Deciphering a cross-national newspaper discourse

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Keywords: content analysis, Egyptian revolution, social media, Facebook, Twitter, cross-national comparison, New York Times, Guardian, Daily Egypt

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Revolution 2.0: Deciphering a cross-national newspaper discourse

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Abstract

In 2011, civil unrest erupted in Egypt quickly gaining a popular momentum that further led to the demise of President Hosni Mubarak. While certain media initially described the revolt as a Facebook revolution, this study specifically evaluated whether three distinct newspapers of record may have contributed to promulgating such a description. A content analysis of news articles (N = 869) published in *The New York Times, The Guardian,* and *Daily News Egypt* revealed that in fact the revolution was rarely attributed to social media and that newspapers varied in their tone of the coverage with *Daily Egypt* being more neutral. This study suggests that social media facilitated and accelerated the 2011 upheavals.

Keywords: content analysis, Egyptian revolution, social media, Facebook, Twitter, cross-national comparison, *New York Times, Guardian, Daily Egypt.*

Revolution 2.0: Deciphering a cross-national newspaper discourse

The scenes of joy that erupted in Tahrir Square on June 24, 2012, when thousands of Egyptians celebrated the election of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi as the nation's first democratically elected president inevitably reminded the onlookers of the multiple and recurrent gatherings that occurred 16 months prior. Witnessing such popular demonstrations, it appeared rather unconvincing to evoke the role of social media. Yet, the examination of the February 2011 events, highlighted in the worldwide media coverage at times as "a Facebook revolution" would be incomplete without investigating the role taken by social networks.

"I want to meet Mark Zuckerberg one day and thank him [...] I'm talking on behalf of Egypt. [...] This revolution started online. This revolution started on Facebook" (Cooper, 2011). This direct statement shared on February 11, 2011 on U.S. cable news network by Wael Ghonim, a marketing manager for Google who used social media to initiate the January 25 gathering considered as the starting point of the Egyptian movement, supports the perception of Facebook's instrumental role in the unrests that led President Hosni Mubarak to relinquish his power.

Beyond this assertion, the discernment of the preponderance of Facebook and Twitter in the Egyptian popular uprising prompted some editors to boast the role of social media in the civic upheaval to the point of labeling the event a Facebook revolution. "Judging by the popular press, in January 2011 Twitter and Facebook went from being simply engaging social diversions to become engines of political change that upended decades of Arab authoritarianism" (Alterman, 2011, p. 103). A succinct look at *National Public Radio* social media editor Andy Carvin's Twitter account sufficed to believe in the fundamental role played by social networks in the revolution (Farhi, 2011; Harbaugh, 2011; Stelter, 2011b). Moreover, his tweeter feed

revealed a strong priority given to non-elites rather than journalistic sources illustrating the use of this medium by the people (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2012).

Yet, one must inquire whether the nature of reported close ties between social media and the civic unrests in Egypt logically justified the journalistic expression of "Facebook Revolution." To which extent did social networks contribute to the toppling of the regime that news organizations objectively qualified as a Facebook revolution? Did social media cause the revolution or deserves credit for accelerating the popular movement? Most importantly, did journalists really name and label the unrests as a Facebook revolution?

More than two years after the event, the present study thus revisits the nature of the coverage of the Egyptian upheavals to answer these questions and decipher the journalistic discourse. Considering the global scope of the event, this research consequently features a cross-national content analysis of the coverage of the Egyptian unrests between the first major popular demonstration in Tahrir Square on January 25 and February 14, 2011 three days after Hosni Mubarak stepped down. The comparative perspective drawn from an analysis of three newspapers, *The New York Times, The Guardian,* and *Daily News Egypt,* constitutes an added value to the existing scholarship often dominated by national empirical research.

Background

Social media in Egypt

Any discussion pertaining to media in Egypt, a country categorized by Reporters Without Borders as a Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) nation, first warrants a description of the governmental influence on news organizations under Mubarak and his attempts to restrain the upheavals in 2011.

Although the Egyptian constitution as delineated in 2011, notably Article 12 and 13, expressed guarantees of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and prohibited censorships, several exceptions to such articles as well as more than 30 additional articles in place under Mubarak's regime presented numerous clauses permitting the prosecution of news professionals (Freedom House, 2012). In fact, Mubarak's government exercised an authoritarian control over the newspaper licensing body, the High Press Council, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), and radio and television licenses.

Symbolically, as popular upheavals gained momentum in January 2011, the Egyptian government employed numerous tactics to overturn the movement. Indeed, from January 27 through February 1, Mubarak's government cut all Internet service and mobile phone providers. This firm attempt against the dissemination of information through the media was further illustrated by the decision to shut down the leading entry points for international fiber optics facilitating Internet exchanges and to restrict television signals. It was not until February 2 that the government restored Internet connections following international pressures.

Ranked 127th in 2010, and dropped to 166th in the 2011/2012 Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, Egypt consequently presents a unique political and social context to consider the role of social media in the revolution, and whether Facebook and Twitter facilitated the diffusion of messages.

According to data available from Internet World Stats and Freedom House, it was estimated that in 2011 Egypt had an Internet penetration rate of 36% and specifically 15% for Facebook. Moreover, estimated rate of use for YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn approached a combined 70% (Chrabieh Badine, 2011). The increasing use of the Internet equally transpired through an exponential utilization of blogs. The Berkman Center for Internet and

Society at Harvard University reported more than 30,000 blogs in the Arab world. In constrained political regimes, bloggers have replaced the role traditionally played by journalists and given the opportunity to increase freedom of expression (Chrabieh Badine, 2011). In fact, Ammar Abdulhamid, author of the *Heretic's Blog*, predicted that such outlets would play an important role in the social and political changes occurring in MENA countries. "Activists in the Middle East had been using social media for a number of years, but the Arab Spring made people realize just how powerful these tools could be" (Cambié, 2012).

Although a growing body of literature supports the assertion that the Internet positively influences a democratic preponderance, opinions nevertheless vary about the power of the Internet to diminish censorship. Scholars appear reluctant to directly credit the Internet for democratic empowerment, and instead acknowledge the strength of the web as a conduit for political changes (Al Nashmi, Cleary, Molleda, & McAdams, 2010; Shirky, 2011a).

Literature particularly addressed the influence of blogs as alternatives to political discourse. A content analysis of forums in four Arab countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan) revealed that Egyptian users expressed a continuous criticism of President Hosni Mubarak (Al Nashmi et al., 2010). Citizens could benefit from a platform enabling them to voice some political and social concerns (Faris, 2010). Blogs in Egypt have particularly carried four functions in relation to the national media: 1) they break stories through first-hand reporting, 2) they document events through postings of videos and photographs, 3) they transmit some content through a third party, 4) they publish some content prohibited on traditional media (Faris, 2010). The example of the blogs' coverage of sexual assaults of Egyptian women in downtown Cairo in Fall 2006 illustrated the impact such media conduits can have on people's opinion of a regime.

Videos and photographs posted online had indeed revealed an event reportedly known to the government and not commented in the traditional media (Faris, 2010).

Facebook facilitating political change

The emergence of blogs and the evidence of their power on the opinion toward a regime, its role in developing a sense of freedom of expression and mobilizing collective action set the path for Facebook. The social media site complemented blogs as a platform to coordinate popular movement by posting dates, times and venues of planned demonstrations. Moreover, the revolutionary discourse recurrently occurred on Facebook. Data showed that with approximately 12 million users at the end of 2011, the number of Egyptians logging on this social network site increased by nearly 30 percent that year compared to 2010 (Ahram Online, 2012; Cambié, 2012; Huang, 2011). Conclusions from the Arab Social Media Report produced by the Dubai School of Government also corroborated this 30% growth in Facebook usage between 2010 and 2011 (Huang, 2011). Furthermore, with a penetration rate projected at 12% in 2011, the latest data assessed Facebook's current penetration rate at 17.4% (Socialbakers, 2013).

Specialists of social media in the Middle East trace the birth of Facebook as a vehicle of activism in Egypt back to April 6, 2008 (Faris, 2008; 2010). Israa Abdel Fattah, a trained journalist and member of the Ghad political party, started a Facebook group urging workers to protest declining wages and rising prices on April 6, a day she called the day of civil disobedience. More than 70,000 members reportedly had joined her group two weeks after its creation. Abdel Fattah had asked Egyptians to stay home in a symbolic act of support toward textile workers facing economic challenges. The instant success of such a mode of activism prompted Islamist columnist Fahmy Howaidy to describe Facebook organizers as "hope for the future in Egypt (Faris, 2010, p. 119). "What Facebook did for the original strike group was first

to construct, very easily, a symbolic call to action that allowed a maximum number of people to join with the least amount of effort" (Faris, 2010, p. 127). Since then, Facebook has been dubbed a driving force to political change (Attia et al., 2011; Hofheinz, 2011) of such prevalent importance that its logo was painted on city walls, a fact journalists failed to report (Gaworecki, 2011).

The world's largest social network site proposes three main features. It allows users to build a profile page with a selected degree of public visibility, develop a network of close and distant ties, and eventually enable users to browse through people registered in the system (boyd & Ellison, 2007). The April 6, 2008 event demonstrated that Facebook also represented a tool to organize political oppositions in authoritarian countries (Faris, 2008). Social Network Sites (SNSs) increase a shared awareness by the propagation of messages subsequently leading to a dictator's dilemma, the reality that a conservative state no longer monopolizes the information flow (Shirky, 2011a).

The direct approach taken by bloggers and activist, such as Abdel Fattah in 2008, placed social and political issues on the forefront and subsequently set the agenda for the traditional media, which made the contentious issues even more salient in the Arab press and later the international media, such as *The Financial Times, The Washington Post, The Observer,* and television networks (Hamdy, 2009).

> *A case in point is that of the bloggers who exposed the sexual harassment incident that occurred in downtown Cairo in 2006 during a public holiday. For several days, the state media did not report the story. However, the Associated Press and satellite television channels picked up on the blogs* (Hamdy, 2009, p. 102).

A Facebook revolution?

Egypt in 2011 was no longer isolated from Facebook, a site then ranked as the one of the three most-visited web pages with Google and Yahoo! (Alaa El Din Farag, 2010; Shapiro, 2009). In fact, reports in 2011 and 2012 had evaluated a total of eight million Facebook users in the country at the beginning of 2011, which constituted one of the highest numbers among any MENA nations (Cambié, 2012; Preston, 2011), and the Facebook community was reportedly growing at a rate of 100% per year (Alaa El Din Farag, 2010). Furthermore, most recent projections additionally considered approximately 12 million Facebook users representing nearly 15% of the overall population and 40% of the estimated total number of Internet users (Internet World Statistics, 2012).

Besides the April 6, 2008 event, the death of Khaled Said also polarized the attention on Facebook. Said, a 28-year-old Egyptian, was allegedly killed in June 2010 in Alexandria by police officers. An anonymous human right activist decided to post YouTube videos and pictures on a Facebook page titled “We Are All Khaled Said” that soon had attracted more than 130,000 people. This symbolic example further underlines the preponderance of social media and its ability to act as an interface between the people and the government. It was also on this page that invitations appeared to protest on January 25, 2011 against the Mubarak ruling (Preston, 2011). Depending on the media consulted, the press also mentioned a 26-year-old woman, Asmaa Mahfouz, who posted on her Facebook profile a message indirectly asking for public support: “People, I am going to Tahrir Square.” Two weeks of popular unrests followed until February 11, 2011, when Hosni Mubarak officially announced his decision to step down from power.

This chain of events garnered such an international coverage (Stelter, 2011b) in the western press that some media labeled the events a Facebook Revolution. Yet, some scholars and observers refrained from directly crediting social media for Mubarak’s fall. They preferred to

praise social networks for their ability to diffuse the information (Van Niekerk, Pillay, & Maharaj, 2011) and empower citizens. As noted by Howard (2011) "the power to control information no longer resides exclusively with the institutions of the state; it resides in media networks; and media networks are constituted by social relations and communication technologies" (p. 20). Allagui and Kuebler (2011) specifically defined the Arab revolution in Egypt as a demonstration of the power of networks (friends, family, work, school, and media).

Social networks were also regarded as means of information subsidies to journalists initially prevented from entering Tahrir Square. Facebook and Twitter acted as dynamic platforms to share information with the media and a wider audience (Rinke & Röder, 2011). It was reported that the week prior to Mubarak's resignation, tweets related to Egypt and political change in that nation skyrocketed from 2,300 per day to more than 200,000 (Cambié, 2012), thus prompting journalists to monitor that discourse. Indeed, Russell (2011) found that many major world news organizations sifted through the Twitter feeds as well as YouTube to isolate pertinent statements providing colors to their respective reporting.

Ultimately, associating Mubarak's fall to social media and describing a popular movement as a Facebook revolution leads to reflect upon the argument exemplified by the debate between Clay Shirky and Malcolm Gladwell: What role do electronic media actually have in public uprisings, most specifically, can they cause such movements or simply accelerate and facilitate such actions? (Wasik, 2011). On one hand, Gladwell (2010, 2011), who presented divergences between connections relying on strong ties (i.e., personal relationships) and those based on weak ties (i.e., friendships on Facebook and Twitter), argued that social media would have a questionable influence on political behaviors such as protesting in public. Additionally, Gladwell (2011) pondered ways to precisely assess the influence of social media on uprisings.

With examples from the demise of President Estrada of the Philippine in 2000, Moldovans protests, and South Koreans actions against commercial imports in 2008, Shirky (2011b) contended on the other hand that electronic media represent tools that largely facilitate the diffusion of a message and the coordination of popular gatherings and actions. Shirky (2011b) believes indeed in the ability for social media to give a stronger political power to the public.

In light of the published scholarship, two questions guided this analysis: a) is the emphasis on narrative stories describing the role played by Facebook and social media reflective of the actual unraveling of events? and b) how did the media frame social media during this three-week period? This study attempts to formulate an answer to both points and therefore complete a nascent scholarship on the subject of social media in Egypt.

Framework

Framing

Kwon and Moon (2008) explained that the integration of a framing theoretical perspective to draw cross-national comparisons has been on a steady increase of the past few years. The inclusion of a framing analysis in the present study aims to provide an understanding of the relationship between issues presented in the three selected news outlets and the public's perception of these modes of presentation. As defined by Entman (1993), "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition" (p. 52). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) argued that framing relies on the assumption that the way an issue is characterized in news reports bears some influence on how the audience processes the information.

The framing scholarship traditionally focuses on a distinction between issue-generic and generic frames. Issue-specific frames are conceptualized as frames valid only for certain specific

issues or events, while generic frames can be applied to a broad range of topics (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). This study privileges issue-specific frames related to social media.

In addition, the evaluation of the dichotomy between positive and negative frames implies a review of the news salience and whether a story appears on the front page of a newspaper, whether the key element is found in the lead paragraph or is buried among background information details (Evans, 2010). In their analysis of the Columbine shooting, Chyi and McCombs (2004) underlined that when reporters compose their coverage, the inclusion or exclusion of certain elements influences the value of the frame.

Salience

The agenda setting literature has traditionally conceptualized salience through three characteristics: attention, prominence and valence (Kiousis, 2004). Scholars have first greatly emphasized how a high quantity of stories and/or space devoted to a topic in the media influences the salience of an issue (McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). "The number of news stories measures the relative salience of an issue on the media agenda" (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 18). Prominence refers to the position of a story within the media (Kiousis, 2004). In the context of the present research, the prominence of social media is operationalized as the position of references to social media within the unit of analysis. Placement and position, rather than volume determines the characteristics of prominence. Some scholars have argued that such aspects are linked to the concept of visibility. In the seminal analysis by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the distinction between major and minor stories underlined the application of an operational definition of prominence. The third component, valence, pertains to attributes of news. Affective elements in the news can shape the overall salience of news items for the audience (Kiousis, 2004). Methodologically speaking, scholars have posited that a higher

valence can come from the number of stories coded with a positive or negative tone towards the object of the story.

Research Questions

Three research questions were adopted for this analytical assessment of the media discourse. Considering the relative lack of analytical perspective due to the recency of the focal topic of this study, the literature does not suggest any unidirectional hypotheses. Cross-national comparative research questions centered on frequencies of appearances and trends' differences were therefore preferred.

RQ1: Will there be some differences in the total mention of social media between the three publications?

RQ2: Will there be some differences in the overall tone of published articles between the three newspapers?

In light of the unique political context present in Egypt and the attempt by Mubarak to control the media, this facet of the coverage pertains more directly to the *Daily Egypt* to understand whether governmental pressures impacted the tone of reports addressing anti-governmental movements.

RQ3: Will the newspapers differ in their framing of social media as the leading cause of the Egyptian revolution?

Methodology

To address these research questions, the present study relied on a content analysis of three distinct newspapers, *The New York Times, The Guardian,* and *Daily News Egypt.*

Content Analysis

This analysis is driven by an a priori design requiring that all decisions on variables be made before the data collection (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Considering that “in the long run, one cannot study mass communication without studying content” (Riffe et al., 2005, p.32), the present cross-national comparative study requires a research method such as quantitative content analysis enabling researchers to obtain an "objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). Moreover, content analysis bears primordial value as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context (Krippendorff, 1980). The perspective adopted here to review the coverage of the Egypt unrest at an international scale represents an unobtrusive and objective technique, where a precise definition of procedures allows researchers to generate an analysis potentially replicable (Krippendorff, 1980).

Unit of analysis

This study took a news story as the main unit of analysis. Trained coders evaluated every news story as retrieved through the online database *LexisNexis*. All articles (N = 869) were retrieved using a general yet encompassing keyword: “Egypt.”

Variables

All variables were predetermined. Coders first looked at variables associated with each individual news stories. They indeed recorded the name of the publication where the story appeared, and the source of the story. Coders decided whether the article was crafted by a staff writer, one of the leading news agencies (*Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France Press, Bloomberg*), a guest columnist, or others and not mentioned (this category included individuals whose affiliation was not clearly detailed in the byline or simply consisted of the first and last name of the author with no biographical mentions). Additionally, the coders noted the length of

every article (the total word count) as well as the news type of each article (hard and soft news). The conceptualization of news type as suggested by the literature is the dichotomous distinction between hard and soft news (Mott, 1952; Tuchman, 1973). Tuchman (1973) previously offered a definition of the two dominant news types. “Hard news concerns events potentially available to analysis or interpretation, and consists of factual presentation of events deemed newsworthy” (Tuchman, 1973, p. 113). On the other, hand soft news is “also known as the feature or human interest story” (Tuchman, 1973, p. 114). Literature traditionally retains an earlier conceptualization that introduces hard news as news stories with high level of newsworthiness requesting immediate publication, whereas soft news does not rely on timeliness and substantive information but rather on human interest stories (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2008; Tuchman, 1972). For the purpose of this research, the operational definition of hard news posits that a hard news article constitutes a news story dominantly presenting factual information linked to a timely event. Examples of hard news stories would be news articles dealing with detailed events about the uprisings, news accounts about the latest moves by the people or updates from Mubarak’s position. Soft news, on the other hand, is accepted as any news story not ruled by timeliness, and dominantly featuring topics not directly associated with current events but focusing on individual and societal characteristics. In the case of this discourse analysis, a soft news represented a portrait of an individual figure, a political analysis, or an economical perspective. Hard news has traditionally been recognized as objective writing based on facts that requested immediate reporting whereas soft news presents a more subjective perspective with colorful details reported independently of any time constraint (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2008). Editorials and columns, which often boasts analytical perspectives, were therefore most likely to be coded as soft news.

Coders then focused on the salience of social media. They reviewed the presence or absence of any references to social media in the title and lead paragraph of each news article. They additionally tallied the total number of references to social media and detailed total per social media category in each news story. Social media was operationalized in this study as being either Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or others (blogs were included in this category).

Ultimately, the coders concentrated on variables necessary to determine the framing of the coverage. They qualitatively judged the nature of the overall tone of the article and whether it appeared as positive, negative or neutral. A positive frame implied that the news story adopted a news angle dominantly positive. Coders chose neutral for the majority of news stories emanating from news agencies, which traditionally adopt a balanced and neutral perspective. They applied the same decision process to the frame of presentation when social media had been mentioned in the article. Described as an affective measure (McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000), the determination of the tone enabled the researchers to establish whether news stories were supportive or dismissive of the role perpetrated by social media during the unrests. Coders needed to ask themselves if the point of view presented carries a positive, negative or neutral perspective. A later variable, whether social media was depicted as the leading cause of the revolution, was added following coders' training.

Sample

The present cross-national comparative study was based on the coverage provided by three newspapers of record, *The New York Times, The Guardian,* and *Daily News Egypt*. Following a review of the availability through the *LexisNexis* database, it was decided that all three publications had to print their content in English and be considered as newspapers of record in their respective countries. These established publications were selected to provide a U.S.

perspective, a European point of view and a specific insight from Egypt. They were included in this sample for editorial reasons as newspapers of editorial quality, and practical reasons, as they were the main newspapers for which *LexisNexis* enabled a complete search. Considering that one of the objectives of this study was to evaluate the frequency of mention of social media in the overall coverage of Egypt, the keyword "Egypt" was the sole determinant used to yield results. Articles were retrieved for the three-week period between January 25, 2011, when Egyptians took to the street in large numbers for what they called "a Day of Rage", and February 14, one of the last days of popular protests in Tahrir Square, three days after President Hosni Mubarak announced he had relinquished his power.

The New York Times was included in this analysis as a leading international news media with reputable and established coverage (Golan, 2006). *The Guardian,* a British newspaper, hailed as the newspaper of the year 2010 in Great Britain, was also selected for this study. This publication features a tradition of journalism quality with a wide network of foreign correspondents. The *Daily News Egypt,* a publication printed in English from Egypt, also comprised our sampling frame as one of the limited Egyptian publications for which *LexisNexis* offered full retrieval of the content. The search yielded a total of 244 articles for *The New York Times,* 282 for *The Guardian,* and 343 for *Daily News Egypt.*

Coder training

Three graduate students were trained to test the coding scheme. In agreement with previous studies (Neuendorf, 2002), a specific training session enabled the raters to code together in an effort to reach consensus on the targeted variables. Following initial discussions on the overall framing of social media, coders agreed to add a variable specifically targeting whether social media was presented as cause of the revolution. Individual code sheets were then provided to

each rater for recording purposes.

Reliability

In accordance with content analysis literature, the reliability is reported first with the percentage of agreement and secondly with Krippendorff's *alpha,* a conservative index accounting for chance agreement (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Campanella Bracken, 2002; Riffe, Lacy, Fico, 2005).

As suggested by Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005), any study dealing with a population size of less than 1,000 can test reliability on 52 content units for a 95% assumed level of agreement.

Reliability was thus assessed with two coders over a total of 57 articles randomly selected by an online number generator. As a majority of the variables studied concerned extremely manifest content (presence or absence of a mention of social media in the title, lead paragraph and overall article, total number of social media mention and details mentions by social media), the reliability logically reached high scores (between 96% and .82 for the total count of Facebook mentions and 100% and 1 for presence or absence of social media in published articles (title, lead or overall story).

Reliability bears more prevalence with variables of a more latent nature. Indeed, article type reached 96% and .92, the overall tone of the article yielded 88% and .64, the framing of social media was of 96% and .89, and social media as the leading cause of revolution reached 88% and .79.

Results

RQ1 was addressed through an ANOVA. Data analysis suggests a significant main effect of the country of origin of the newspaper on the total mention of social media in a news article, $F(2, 868) = 5.20$, $p < .01$. A SNK post-hoc analysis showed that *The New York Times* ($M = .77$,

SD = 2.72) had a significantly higher total of social media mentions per article than *Daily News Egypt* (*M* = .22, *SD* = .943) while *The Guardian* (*M* = .54, *SD* = 2.50) did not statistically differ from either.

RQ2 utilized a cross-tabs analysis. Data first revealed a significant difference in the overall tone of the article between the three publications, (χ^2 (4, *N* = 869) = 137.32, *p* < .001). Results actually showed that nearly 35% of articles from *The Guardian* presented a positive tone compared to *The New York Times* (18%) and specifically *Daily News Egypt* (4.1%). Although the proportion of published negative articles was considerably lower for all newspapers (less than 10%), the British newspaper was the most likely to frame its articles with such a slant (9.9%) compared to *The New York Times* (6.6%). The *Daily News Egypt* contained the fewest articles with negative mentions (0.9%). Data analysis additionally revealed that *Daily News Egypt* had adopted the most neutral tone in their writing among the newspaper under scrutiny with 95% of its content presented as such. On the other hand, *The New York Times* (75.4%) and especially *The Guardian* (55.3%) adopted more rarely a neutral perspective.

A second analysis, taking into consideration only the articles coded as related to the Egyptian revolution (*N* = 722), also revealed significant differences in overall tone of the content between news organizations, (χ^2 (4, *N* = 722) = 121.92, *p* < .001). Data indeed confirmed the trend noticed above, underlining the fact that *The Guardian* was the most likely to adopt a negative tone to its stories about the revolution (10.2%) compared to *The New York Times* (6.2%) and *Daily News Egypt* (0.8%). When reporting specifically on the Egyptian revolution, *Daily Egypt* was indeed the most likely to present the information in a neutral manner (94.7%) compared to *The New York Times* (75.6%) and *The Guardian* (52.8%).

To address the framing of social media more specifically, a cross-tabs analysis was

conducted to answer RQ3. Data showed significant differences between the three publications in their framing of social media as the leading cause of the Egyptian revolution, (χ^2 (2, N = 685) = 7.74, p < .05). Results specifically indicated that more than 90% of the articles containing a mention of social media in all three publications did not present social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or others) as the leading cause of the events (91.35% for *The New York Times;* 92.9% for *The Guardian;* and 97.6% for *Daily News Egypt*). Additionally, data showed that *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* boasted nearly similar proportions of articles describing social media as the leading cause of the revolution (8.7% and 7.1%, respectively). The picture contrasts with *Daily News Egypt,* as 2.4% of news stories published in the Egyptian newspaper depicted social media as the leading cause of the unrest.

Discussion

The present cross-national study of the editorial discourse featured in three newspapers (*The New York Times, The Guardian, Daily News Egypt)* traditionally categorized as publications of records (Golan, 2006) in their respective countries, contributes to the outpouring of analyses on the Arab Spring. The comparative nature of this work certainly adds a value relevant to determine the role of social media in the Egyptians unrests.

So what are the main lessons of this assessment?

Results first indicated that *The New York Times* had a higher proportion of social media mentions in their published stories than the Egyptian publication. Such findings underline a discussion present in previous work (Al Nashmi et al., 2011). Ever since the exponential growth of the Internet penetration in MENA countries, scholars have been hesitant in directly crediting the Internet for democratic empowerment of the public. Academicians investigating the issue have preferred a more cautionary approach leading to the acknowledgement of the strength of the

Internet in general and social media in particular as beneficial conduits for political changes. Faris (2010) explained in his work that Egyptian citizens would now find such modern media platforms as vehicles enabling them to express their political and social concerns. The perspective offered by Faris (2010) reflects a more neutral approach toward the description of media. Additionally, data corroborated what Stelter (2011b) observed when he commented how the Arab Spring had gained momentum in the Western press and had been labeled a Facebook Revolution.

Findings secondly revealed that *Daily News Egypt* was most likely to adopt a neutral tone in their published stories compared to *The New York Times* and most certainly *The Guardian,* the newspaper with the highest proportion of both positive and negative articles. While a first explanation leads directly to a journalistic standard of objectivity, the significant difference found between all three newspapers may in fact address divergences in media systems and overall media environments. Great Britain and the United States, categorized as part of the North Atlantic Liberal model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), boasts a more liberal environment for news organizations, granting a guaranteed level of freedom of press and empowering journalists as a counter power. The culture certainly differs in Egypt where media have traditionally been closely monitored by the government. The strong majority of neutral articles would therefore illustrate a climate of tension between the press and the government at a critical political time.

Eventually, the analysis showed that *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* had higher proportion of depictions of social media as the leading cause of the unrests than the Egyptian daily. While the finding certainly underlines what Stelter wrote in a *New York Times* column and what major cable networks such as *CNN* described, the finite number of news stories (less than 20) does not permit to conclude that social media sparked the events that unfolded in Egypt

during two critical weeks two years ago. Additionally, one must question whether the Egyptian media devoted a lesser focus on the issue partly because of an understanding of the low penetration rate of such media in the overall Egyptian population (i.e., 15% for Facebook). As detailed by Faris (2010), and as presented in the reviewed articles, social media enabled the democratic discourse between citizens with access. The analysis provided by Cottle (2011) may in fact points in the right direction for further analytical attempts. The author explained that social media may have served as watchdogs for the controlled national media and at times acted as news alerts for international news organizations such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian.*

Limitations and further research

The present comparative analysis of a cross-national editorial discourse bears some value to understand whether some news organizations emphasized some aspects of the coverage of the Egypt unrests more than others, and whether the role played by social media was bolstered in one country rather than another.

This research appears however weakened due firstly to the dependence on *LexisNexis* to access an Egyptian publication. While numerous content analyses have resorted to the database to consult the American and British publications, few have used it for an Egyptian news organization. The database did not offer the possibility to select between multiple Egyptians newspapers printed in English thus leaving the researchers with merely one option.

The second limitation of this research is partially attributable to the usage of tone as a leading variable. While it appeared valuable to include it in the codebook as a dominant variable to understand the nature of the discourse and the potential impact the Egyptian government may have had on the coverage of by *Daily Egypt*, prior work has discouraged its usage for it

traditionally leads to low reliability as evident in this very research. It imports also to precise that a study of newspapers of records may in fact present more elitist viewpoints. The popular movement under scrutiny really engaged the mass public, thus a study of a more popular press may yield different results.

Besides observed weaknesses, scholars eager to pursue this line of research could focus on several points. The first suggestion includes follow-up surveys in all three countries. Undoubtedly, this content analysis presents enriching evidence to understand what the media captured. Yet, because of the popular nature of these unrests, a cross-national survey would allow to go further in the discourse analysis. This phase of research may however be now hindered due to the delay since the occurrence of the events. Considering that "the time frame is one of the most important considerations agenda-setting researchers must address in their analyses" (Wanta, 2009), scholars would need to acknowledge a priori the fact that they would most certainly face results indicating a stronger effect of dissipation than normally anticipated. Chaffee (1972) clearly explained that while a short time lag may not capture the causal hypothesis, a time lag of a longer interval presents the danger or washing out the causal effect over time.

Secondly, it would be of strong relevance to broaden the content analysis to include a wider sample with news media such as *Al Jazeera,* the *BBC,* and even U.S. television networks. It would present an opportunity to analyze whether television networks placed a greater or lesser emphasis on social media than the print press did. Ultimately, the integration of a qualitative research method may yield complementary results. In-depth interviews with journalists who were assigned to Egypt during the events could shed further light on the nature of their framing as well as the importance of social media according to their point of views.

Conclusion

"The role of social media and technology emerged more clearly than ever in this historic event" (Artwick, 2011). In the wake of a direct statement by Wael Ghonim that the Egypt revolution constituted in fact a 'Revolution 2.0', several media labeled the Egyptians unrests as a social media movement (Crovitz, 2011; Preston, 2011). More specifically, the civil demonstrations in Egypt reflected different roles for different kinds of social media. Results developed here suggested that social media may have favored the acceleration of a movement rather than directly causing it. In fact, Rafat Ali, founder of *paidcontent.org* said Facebook helped organize people such as detailing how and where to meet, while Twitter played an amplification role, enabling people to share news and comments in real time (Crovitz, 2011). This dichotomy needs further exploration as it may establish itself as an analytical framework for research targeting these social media and their relationships with political and civic engagement. For Artwick (2011), the marriage of technology and social behavior, primordial in Egypt created a phenomenon the author labeled as "technosociality". This term further places under the limelight the debate about the end of the mass communication paradigm, and how social media and their political and civic consequences may reflect the advent of a new model of media effects.

In many countries, the growing preponderance of the Internet and its potential power to provide alternative viewpoints and exchange of information beyond the national borders generated anxiety. In the Arab world new information and communication technologies can undermine state censorship. The events thus integrate a historical line of scholarship linking technology to social movements and political evolution. The present research reflects a growing body of cross-cultural comparative research. "Cross-cultural research communication involves

comparing and contrasting the communication patterns of people of one culture with the communication patterns observed in people from another culture" (Levine, Sun Park, & Kim, 2007). The global impact of the Egyptian uprisings represented indeed an exemplary opportunity to develop such a perspective.

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