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Social Media, Political Upheaval, and State Control

by

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Contents

Introduction

Communication technology has always affected international issues and events. First came the printing press, churning out copies of the Bible. Then samizdat emerged in Soviet-era Russia passing information on printed flyers to avoid detection by the police. Now the phenomena of social media pervades everyday life with the ability to share pictures, videos, likes and dislikes, along with personal thoughts, hopes, and fears with the click of the mouse. In each example technology helped further various international causes. Lately, social media has become the tool of choice for dissidents to coordinate, plan, and rally support for protests against oppressive governments. Numerous uprisings have been labeled "social media" revolutions, yet upon closer inspection, one finds that social media is not the root cause of any given rebellion. While it is easy and exciting to believe that social media had such an impact on revolts in the Middle East and Latin America or is to blame for collective action in China, these instances require further investigation into the use of social media for revolutionary purposes. Once analyzed, it becomes apparent that social media is not a panacea for the world's ills. Therefore, current foreign policies must be revised to avoid policy failures that result from over-hyping any one technology and its supposed powers for change.

Social media has, in some form or another, existed for hundreds of years. While it seems like a new buzzword, such forms of communication have always been in place, albeit through different methods which continually evolve. A study from the University of Helsinki compares the act of painting political slogans on city and house walls in ancient Pompeii to the modern-day Facebook "wall," where users post articles of interest, engage in discussions (both on political and decidedly non-political issues) and connect with friends throughout the world. The study

discovered that many of the political messages were written on the walls of private homes and thus reveal an early form of social networking as candidates would have needed permission to post their slogans on homeowners' walls. This suggests that those homeowners who allowed these slogans on their property endorsed said candidates.[1] Indeed, a parallel can be drawn between the ruins of Pompeii and the popular social networking site – many Facebook users dedicate their wall to promoting political candidates and causes that they believe in, sharing their views with everyone who has access to their wall.

Modern social media, which exists primarily in the online sphere, now dominates life and the effects increasingly spill over into the public domain. Long gone are the days of painting messages on the walls of houses; now Internet citizens, known as netizens, can make their innermost thoughts known to the world through social networking sites and blogs without anyone's permission. This access is available at users' fingertips, with online applications for cell phones and computers becoming nearly ubiquitous in the developed world. For those in less-developed regions, Internet cafes serve as a link to the rest of the world. In the more restrictive countries, netizens either develop paths around government-constructed firewalls or create homegrown social networking sites to feed the desire for online connection to avoid the ire of authoritarian governments. The new and ever-evolving technology behind social media lends itself to many different definitions and encompasses numerous new websites and services.

The most basic definition, put forth by Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, provides the foundation for understanding what social media encompasses: "Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications . . . that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." They go on to describe user-generated content as needing to "fulfill three basic

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[1] Stephanie Pappas, "Pompeii 'Wall Posts' Reveal Ancient Social Networks," *LiveScience.com*, January 10, 2013, accessed February 16, 2013, http://news.yahoo.com/pompeii-wall-posts-reveal-ancient-social-networks-183829775.html.

requirements in order to be considered as such: first, it needs to be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and finally it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices."[2]

Based on this combination of factors, an abundance of services and websites qualifies as social media – Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter, and Second Life, to name a few. Social media also includes blogs, content communities, and virtual-game worlds. However, the focus of this paper will center on social networking sites specifically and their role in political change around the world. The primary social networking sites considered all played a part in several citizen-led uprisings spanning the globe, and they continue to be a factor in on-going situations. These sites include but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The user-generated content on these particular sites obviously meets the criteria set by Kaplan and Haenlein. The public can access the content; the material created is unique to each user; and postings, tweets, and videos are all generated by people wanting to voice their opinions unless it is a page run by a legitimate business, as many companies have discovered the marketing potential of social media. Therefore, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook comprise the main sites addressed in this study; for no research exists proving any virtual game world or even the most politically charged blog helped organize a massive protest against an oppressive government.

Facebook is the most popular social media networking site in the world, with an estimated one billion unique monthly users.[3] Facebook fosters online connections with friends

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[2] Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons* 53, (2010): 59-68, doi: 10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003.

[3] Emil Protalinski, "Facebook passes 1.06 billion monthly active users, 680 million mobile users, and 618 million daily users," *The Next Web*, January 30, 2013, accessed April 4, 2013, http://thenextweb.com/facebook/2013/01/30/facebook-passes-1-06-billion-monthly-active-users-680-million-mobile-users-and-618-million-daily-users/.

and acquaintances alike through a collection of shared messages, pictures, videos, status updates, and "likes" (users can "like" anything from a preferred retail outlet, service provider, or status update, to favorite movies, books, and non-profit causes). Meanwhile Twitter, a short-message service that allows users to "tweet" updates of 140 characters or less, garners approximately 250,000,000 distinct users each month.[4] Trending Twitter topics are categorized based on the attached "hashtags" (denoted by the # sign, followed by a short descriptor, i.e. #jan25, which was used during Egypt's uprising, which began on January 25). Some tweets append multiple hashtags to connect with multiple topics. Users follow certain threads based on the subject and attendant hashtag. Other high-traffic social sites include YouTube, a site comprised entirely of videos uploaded by Internet citizens; LinkedIn, a site aimed at connecting professionals throughout and across industries; Pinterest, a virtual bulletin board of interests and hobbies accumulated and pinned by its patrons, and Google+, Google's answer to Facebook.

Other countries establish their own versions of these sites, in addition to the most popular social networking sites. Some governments, mostly authoritarian regimes such as China, Azerbaijan, and Vietnam, ban these sites. Many simply generate their own social media sites to satisfy their constituents. Others ignore the trend for fear of losing control of the regime through a popular uprising. China has accumulated the most successes, creating Renren, Weibo, and Youku to take the place of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube respectively, since those sites are blocked in China.[5] However, it is Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter that have earned massive popularity by connecting people all over the world. These sites are causing many unimagined consequences, both positive and negative.

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[4] "Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites | February 2013," *ebizmba.com*, February 1, 2013, accessed February 16, 2013, http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites.
[5] Michael Anti, Ted Talks, *Behind the Great Firewall of China*, Video, 18:52, June 2012, http://www.ted.com/talks/michael_anti_behind_the_great_firewall_of_china.html.

By definition, these sites are meant to be social and intend to unite people across many different spectrums and locales. What no one could have predicted is the utilization of these services to bring people together over shared grievances and inspire collective action against those at the root of various issues, usually repressive or corrupt governments. Instances of public protest that started online and moved offline span the globe – from the most obvious in the Middle East, to lesser known actions in Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Moldova, and China. The objections to the status quo in these demonstrations against governments cover a range of topics as citizens oppose government oppression, corruption, and decadence. In opposition to this trend, many governments work tirelessly to avoid such threats to their regimes.

The unrest in the Middle East notably brought the advantages of organization via social media to the forefront in early 2011, as citizens in Tunisia and Egypt created Facebook groups to voice displeasure against the respective administrations in what became known as the Arab Spring. In Tunisia, the spark provided by the self-immolation of a fruit-stand vendor unleashed a torrent of online protests that shifted offline, resulting in demonstrations outside of the main government building. This eventually led to the abdication of President Ben Ali. The success in Tunisia spilled over into nearby Egypt as Egyptians rallied around the wrongful death of Egyptian citizen Khaled Said at the hands of security forces. A Facebook page, We Are All Khaled Said, offered a platform for angry Egyptians to unite and ultimately helped coordinate large-scale protests all over Egypt, aided by real-time updates from Twitter.[6] An extended, initially peaceful sit-in staged in Tahrir Square resulted from the Facebook organizing and Twitter updates. The protest disintegrated when security forces began firing live ammunition into the crowds. However, the protesters accomplished their end goal – the resignation of President

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[6] Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2012).

Hosni Mubarak. Following that change in leadership, protests erupted in Bahrain, Syria, and Libya.

Tensions have simmered in the Middle East region for many years, and while social media certainly impacted the Arab Spring, it was also utilized in the earlier failed revolutions in Moldova and Iran in 2009, resulting in a mixed record for social media when used for political change. Social media has also most recently been at the center of protests in Mexico and Chile, whose effects are just being realized.

The Arab Spring stands out as the most well-recognized and publicized instance of employing social media during an attempt for political change. Social media also played the dual role of organizing protests against the Chinese government in blatant instances of corruption while exposing the government's weaknesses. The government's response to protests is closely watched by netizens as an indication of vulnerability. When a high-speed train crash near Wenzhou in July 2011 killed more than 40 people and injured hundreds, Chinese netizens expressed displeasure with the government's attempt to cover up important details of the crash via the Twitter-like site Weibo. After more than 26 million messages were posted on Weibo, many of which embarrassed government officials, the government agreed to investigate the crash more closely.[7] Since the Chinese Communist Party fears mass public action, it responded to the outcry over the crash to prevent the online activism from becoming an offline physical protest.[8] China also engages in numerous other strategies, such as banning popular websites and censoring content. China is just one of several countries to focus on preserving power by maintaining an iron grip on not just social media, but the whole of the Internet.

[7] Jonathan Hassid, "Safety Valve or Pressure Cooker? Blogs in Chinese Political Life," *Journal of Communication* 62, no. 2 (April 2012): 212-230, accessed November 5, 2012, doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01634.x.
[8] Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts, "How Censorship Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," October 2, 2012, accessed November 5, 2012, http://jrnetsolserver.shorensteincente.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/China_KingStudy.pdf.

While this explosion of social unrest aimed at authoritarian and corrupt governments elicits attention, whether these uprisings organized via social media actually result in political change is far more fascinating. An on-going argument exists between those who believe social media made all the difference in these recent protests (the "cyber-optimists") and those who claim that change was bound to happen eventually and that social media did not drive the movements (the "cyber-pessimists"). Especially in the Middle East, many christened the revolutions as a "Twitter revolution" or "Facebook revolution." But is that really the case? Did social media truly act as the harbinger of change in repressive regions such as Tunisia, Egypt, or Bahrain? Has social media really affected the issues brought to light in Colombia, Mexico, Chile, or China? And, most troubling, how far will governments go to prevent an Arab Spring in other parts of the world? In the end, how will these now omnipresent tools continue to shape the future?

This paper will attempt to answer these important questions, as they truly have an effect on current affairs and will continue to affect international issues and policies. Chapter One describes the argument between the cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists and seeks a more stable middle-ground between the two extremes. Chapter Two applies all of the theories and philosophies discussed in the first chapter to several case studies of international events. The Arab Spring is discussed in-depth, but this argument also pertains to several events in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Equally vital to this debate are the ways in which governments respond to these episodes and how they strive to prevent similar incidents. The final chapter synthesizes the academic arguments with the individual examples to answer the questions above and suggest a course for policy-makers and the general public alike to avoid common misconceptions that can accompany viewing issues from one extreme or the other.

Chapter 1

The Debate

The debate between the cyber-optimists (some prefer the term cyber-utopian, but that seems too strong of a label – optimism conveys hope while utopianism insinuates far too rosy an outlook, especially for this particular debate) and the cyber-pessimists has been a hot topic since the use of Twitter to organize protests in Moldova and Iran in 2009. The Arab Spring only served to highlight this dichotomy. Both sides construct completely valid arguments regarding social media in this highly contentious debate, making it difficult to choose one side or the other. However, the goal of any debate is to sway people from one side to another. So how does one decide whether to be optimistic or pessimistic about the role of social media in effecting social and political changes?

First, both sides of the social media debate must be considered. There is no shortage of proponents for either stance, but only a few who have intelligently researched the issues and firmly maintain their opinions. This discussion will feature two particular, well-known and often-cited media commentators and will augment each viewpoint with other writings from each position. In the optimistic camp stands Clay Shirky, a media professor at New York University. Malcolm Gladwell, a writer for *The New Yorker*, embodies the pessimistic stance. Both Shirky and Gladwell write extensively on the subject of using social media tools for the purposes of revolution, mostly focusing on their role in the Arab Spring in 2011. However, their positions can be extended beyond the Arab Spring, especially since this debate has continued while the Arab Spring has waned and other national "springs" have sprung up around the world.

The Optimist's Argument

Shirky epitomizes the optimistic belief in the power of social media to enact change within repressed governments. In his book *Here Comes Everybody*, Shirky recounts all the various possibilities for social media to make a difference: from finding a lost cell phone to coordinating political protests against oppressive regimes. Shirky finds social media beneficial, and he advocates for utilizing the coordination and information-sharing aspects of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. This book was written in 2008, before Iran's failed 2009 revolution or the more successful uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, yet it still reinforces many salient points. Since then, these social tools have been employed in countless protests and instances of grassroots action around the world, from the Middle East to Asia to Latin America and beyond. Despite the application of these tools by terrorists to organize attacks, Shirky still believes in the inherent good of social media as a political tool: "But whoever is using these tools, political action has changed when a group of previously uncoordinated actors can create a public protest that the government can neither interdict in advance nor suppress without triggering public documentation."[9]

This statement has been demonstrated time and again – through the protests during the Arab Spring, in the youth opposition movement during the most recent Mexican election, and the exposure of corruption in China. In all of these instances, social media facilitated the organization of people while governments carefully contemplated their responses to these actions. Government administrators are well aware that any cell phone camera can capture bad behavior by government officials or security forces, embarrassing an already embattled government trying to hang on to power. However, some have called Shirky naïve in his optimistic view of social media. Shirky's response? "As I've said elsewhere, the best reason to

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[9] Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, (New York: Penguin, 2008), 171.

believe that social media can aid citizens in their struggle to make government more responsive is that both citizens and governments believe that."[10]

For Shirky, social media's advantage lies in the ability to remove restrictions to coordinating action. When it was previously impossible to gather people from around the world to unite in a single cause, it is now possible to start a revolution with just a Facebook page, a Twitter feed, or a YouTube channel. Tunisia's ouster of Ben Ali started with the circulation of a video showing Mohamed Bouazizi, the fruit vendor, setting himself on fire in front of the government office. Then a Facebook page surfaced and caught on in Egypt as Egyptians expressed their support for the nearby country. In Egypt, it started with a Facebook page and continued as protesters tweeted their positions and minute-by-minute reports of action on the ground.[11] As another cyber-optimist, Blake Hounshell, stated in his article "The Revolution will be Tweeted": "Already, Twitter has become an essential – no, the essential – tool for following and understanding the momentous changes sweeping the Arab region."[12] These tools have also become an important way to chronicle history as it happens in real time.

Social media lowered the barriers to grassroots action and evolved into an important source of information about instances of political uprisings around the world. This source of knowledge benefited government agencies with a stake in the outcomes as well as the mainstream media, which kept the general population informed. This fostered other revolutions as citizens in other authoritarian countries witnessed their compatriots achieve more than they ever have before. Social media also facilitated understanding for those who are far removed from

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[10] Clay Shirky, "Consulting with Libya in 2007,"*Clay Shirky* (Blog), March 1, 2011 (1:16 pm), http://www.shirky.com/weblog/2011/03/consulting-with-libya-in-2007/.

[11] Andy Carvin, *Distant Witness*, (New York: CUNY Journalism Press, 2012), 1-60.

[12] Blake Hounshell, "The Revolution will be Tweeted," *Foreign Policy*, Jul/Aug 2011, no. 187: 20-21, accessed December 21, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/20/the_revolution_will_be_tweeted?wp_login_redirect=0.

the situation. Despite his enthusiasm for the ability of social media to make a difference, Shirky also understands that social media is not the primary driver of these changes. Shirky articulates this notion well:

> . . . [S]ocial tools don't create collective action – they merely remove the obstacles to it. Those obstacles have been so significant and pervasive, however, that as they are being removed, the world is becoming a different place. This is why many of the significant changes are based not on the fanciest, newest bits of technology but on simple, easy-to-use tools like e-mail, mobile phones, and websites, because these are the tools most people have access to and, critically, are comfortable using in their daily lives. Revolution doesn't happen when society adopts new technologies – it happens when society adopts new behaviors.[13]

As will be demonstrated, it is clear that the most change occurs when society changes its behavior, but that can include adopting new uses for social media

Again, this point is clearly illustrated by many of the uprisings around the world. Unrest has simmered in many of these locations for many years. Social media lowered or removed the barriers to organization and encouraged people to adopt the new technology. With the understanding and ease of use came the ability and urge to change the status quo. However, while optimism deserves a place in the discussion, those who hold a pessimistic point of view represent equally strong arguments about the shortcomings of social media, especially when utilized for political change.

The Pessimist's Argument

Gladwell entrenched himself on the negative side early in the debate between the optimists and pessimists. In a 2010 article in *The New Yorker*, Gladwell pits the 1960 civil disobedience of the lunch-counter sit-ins in Greensboro, N.C., against the modern use of social media for social activism. As Gladwell reminds us, "These events in the early sixties became a

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[13] Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, 159-160.

civil-rights war that engulfed the South for the rest of the decade – and it happened without e-mail, texting, Facebook, or Twitter."[14] Many successful social movements preceded the advent of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. These changes were founded on strong, personal ties among the participants. As demonstrated by such radical movements, activists did not require online social networking to effect change. The civil rights movement sets just one such example; Gladwell also points to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the founding of the Red Brigades in 1970's Italy.

Consequently, in the article "Small Change," Gladwell asserts that social media weaves a web of weak ties: "Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may have never met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with. That's why you can have a thousand 'friends' on Facebook, as you never could in real life." While Gladwell posits that strength can be found in weak ties, he believes that truly radical change cannot be founded on weak ties alone: "Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice. We are a long way from the lunch counters of Greensboro."[15] Gladwell correctly suggests that social media provides a platform for coordination, but in order for a protest to succeed, on any level, it takes actual people coming together in the streets. Subsequently, those people will not take action unless those they share strong ties with inspire them to do so. One or two people, no matter how committed, does not an uprising make.

In the midst of this wider debate between cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism, Gladwell and Shirky directly confront one another over whether social media actually advance a

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[14] Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, accessed January 2, 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell.
[15] Ibid.

revolution. Their candid argument is instructive. In an article published by the Council on

Foreign Relations, they go head-to-head with their opinions. Gladwell states:

> 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.

Shirky responds by pointing out:

> 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.[16]

While revolutions coalesce through the strong ties of committed people, social media allows

those groups to plan, coordinate, and communicate in ways the protesters in Greensboro never

imagined.

So where does that leave this debate? Yes, social media sites are instrumental in

fomenting revolutions, but for that to happen, a strong base of support must already exist.

Therefore, the cyber-optimists are right to see a future in which social media unites citizens with

shared grievances and encourages them to rise up against their oppressors. Meanwhile cyber-

pessimists are correct in understanding that change cannot happen by just clicking the "like"

button on Facebook or tweeting in support of a particular movement. This dichotomy demands a

more balanced analysis – positivity combined with a healthy dose of reality. This constitutes

what Evgeny Morozov calls "cyber-realism."

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[16] Malcom Gladwell and Clay Shirky, "From Innovation to Revolution: Do Social Media Make Protests Possible?" *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 153 (2011):153-154, accessed December 20, 2012, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67325/malcolm-gladwell-and-clay-shirky/from-innovation-to-revolution.

The Cyber-Realist's Argument

Writing about the dark side of Internet freedom in his book *The Net Delusion*, Morozov offers a realistic point of view on the benefits and consequences of social media, and the Internet in general, on a contemporary global scale. The advent of the Internet heralded much optimism about its ability to spread democracy to those parts of the world seemingly immune to the multiple waves of democracy. However, in 2003, Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas demonstrated in their prescient book, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes,* that "Internet use does not currently pose a significant threat to the stability of authoritarian rule." [17] They arrived at this conclusion by examining several case studies of the most closed, repressed governments, including China, Vietnam, Singapore, and several Middle Eastern countries. Current events prove Kalathil and Boas' early research correct. China, Singapore, Vietnam, and much of the Middle East remain sealed off from much of the World Wide Web. Those governments, among others, actively censor content and regularly disrupt Internet service. Now that the Internet has failed to open these closed regimes, social media emerges as the new poster child for political change, facilitating numerous movements across the globe. Like the Internet itself though, social media has not resulted in the effortless spread of freedom that the optimists and utopians had so fervently hoped for. Morozov agrees with this declaration and uses his book to further the premise that neither the Internet nor social media will crack the closed regimes nor claim sole responsibility for any dissident-led uprising.

However, Morozov believes that social media and the Internet, in general, are in fact important tools in a toolbox full of useful equipment for the purpose of encouraging authoritative

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[17] Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 73.

regimes to relinquish control for the betterment of the individual society and global civilization.

Morozov states:

> To salvage the Internet's promise to aid the fight against authoritarianism, those of us in the West who still care about the future of democracy will need to ditch both cyber-utopianism and Internet-centrism [what Morozov calls a "philosophy of action" that focuses on how to make changes, using the Internet as the primary framing, without considering the context in which the change is to occur]. Currently, we start with a flawed set of assumptions (cyber-utopianism) and act on them using a flawed, even crippled methodology (Internet-centrism). The result is what I call the Net Delusion. Pushed to the extreme, such logic is poised to have significant global consequences that may risk undermining the very project of promoting democracy. It's a folly the West could do without.[18]

There are many policy pitfalls that the West could stand to avoid, but few so important as impeding freedom and access to information.

Morozov highlights several significant points. First, that social media and the Internet still retain the possibility of at least allowing for greater information flow to closed-off societies. Second, to maintain this opportunity, analyses of events on the ground must be reframed along with the approach to policy-making. Finally, and most important, if policy-makers continue to base policies on Internet-centrism and cyber-utopianism or even cyber-optimism, the spread of freedom will most certainly be hindered. These policies will not accurately reflect regional differences or place too much importance on technology alone. Consequently, those Westerners blind to these issues will definitely lose the policy game. Furthermore, democracy and freedom will certainly fail to spread as no singular technology can achieve such lofty goals.

Therefore, on its own, social media will not be responsible for bringing down oppressive regimes, but if used in concert with other tactics built on strong relationships and good policy-making, social media can certainly assist those who are willing to take a stand against a repressive government. And on this point, Morozov the realist and Shirky the optimist agree.

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[18] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), xvii.

Shirky states: "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 citizen's ability to be more publicly vocal and to coordinate more rapidly and on a larger scale than before these tools existed." [19]

Social media has altered the public sphere in several ways. Not only does social media allow for increased coordination, planning, and communication of real-world protests, it also acts as a megaphone, drawing attention to various issues. In every example, from the Iranian elections in 2009 through the Arab Spring in 2011 and the elections in Mexico in 2012, to the countless instances of collective action in China, social media took those occurrences and thrust them into the spotlight, attracting national and international media attention. As Golnaz Esfandiari wrote in regards to the so-called "Twitter Revolution" during the 2009 elections in Iran:

> Twitter played an important role in getting word about the events in Iran out to the wider world. Together with YouTube, it helped focus the world's attention on the Iranian people's fight for democracy and human rights. New media over the last year created and sustained unprecedented international moral solidarity with the Iranian struggle -- a struggle that was being bravely waged many years before Twitter was ever conceived."[20]

Without this kind of international awareness, many of these efforts would have fizzled out or gone unnoticed by many, especially in the West. This sustained consciousness of events unfolding around the globe enabled many of the uprisings to continue and receive support from invested parties from every corner of the world. With this increased attentiveness to these issues came support in the form of financial contributions, continued media coverage, and an unprecedented number of international spectators who previously had no interest in these parts of the world.

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[19] Gladwell and Shirky.
[20] Golnaz Esfandiari, "The Twitter Devolution," *Foreign Policy*, June 7, 2010, accessed March 1, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/07/the_twitter_revolution_that_wasnt.

Therefore, social media has cemented its place in international uprisings. Without it, many of the protests would not have started, or have garnered so much attention, both within the region as well as international media attention. Its usefulness in coordinating and communicating with a diverse and dispersed group has been well documented. While it will clearly not become the harbinger of freedom and democracy within the repressed areas of the world, social media still represents a constructive means of promoting social and political change, even in open societies.

However, one cannot rely solely on the words of these so-called media experts. Theories and philosophies are well and good, but this warrants a deeper investigation into the individual episodes. To fully understand the significance of what is happening in each of these volatile situations and in relationship to social media, the theories and philosophies outlined above must connect to real live events and in-depth research. To accomplish this, case studies on several regions require analysis – the Middle East (Iran, Tunisia, and Egypt, especially), Eastern Europe (focusing on Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan), China, and Latin America (Chile, Mexico, and Colombia, specifically). Once individual events and governments are scrutinized and the outcomes linked to the ideas put forth by scholars such as Morozov, Shirky, and Gladwell, then conclusions about the effectiveness of social media usage in these circumstances can be drawn. And from there, a pertinent discussion about the future must follow to prevent Morozov's prediction of folly in the West if current policies are not amended.

Chapter 2

Case Studies

In this section, case studies from around the globe tie into real world events and narratives. When all perspectives and examples are considered together, they create a much clearer picture of how social media empowered various uprisings and mass demonstrations in different regions of the world. Each country's geo-political experiences differ from the next. Despite many countries' rebellions coming on the heels of others in the region, each story is unique. Furthermore, how each revolt and movement intersected with social media also has fluctuated. Not only protesters exploited the newest technology to launch their insurrections. Many governments quickly caught on to the rebellious applications of social media and exploited the new media by manipulating access to social media and spreading propaganda via these avenues. Combining all these factors affecting the various movements and government responses leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in these attempted revolutions.

When looking at the bigger picture, the case for a realistic approach to this turn of events becomes clear. Social media factored heavily in each example of action against oppressive governments, but the governments' responses are also telling. Furthermore, despite the high level of enthusiasm during the various movements, very little has actually changed within these repressed regions of the world. By placing these examples in context, the theories and philosophies outlined above begin to make sense.

In the Beginning: Ukraine, Moldova, and Iran

Revolutionaries began relying on Internet-based technologies as early as a decade ago. One of the first documented uprisings fomented through social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, occurred in the Eastern European country of Moldova in April 2009. However, some point to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 as the beginnings of online activism, but that happened just as online social media sites were created. Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook in early 2004, but it was confined to elite universities until 2006 when it opened to everyone over the age of 13. Twitter had yet to be conceived, leaving the Orange Revolution to leverage online message boards to unite activists and encourage real-world action.

In Ukraine's case, in which a pro-democracy candidate opposed the hand-picked successor of the authoritarian regime, the Internet "allowed for the creation of a space for dissenting opinions of 'citizen journalists' in an otherwise self-censored media environment." Researchers of the Orange Revolution, named for the color of the pro-democracy candidate's campaign, also note that:

> It is worth stating that few observers would argue that the Orange Revolution would not have happened without the Internet. Moreover, given the multiplicity of factors at play during a political revolution, it is not appropriate to infer that in similar circumstances the applications of technology will lead to the same outcome as in Ukraine.[21]

Participants in the Ukrainian revolution succeeded in forcing multiple rounds of voting to ensure fair elections, eventually electing the pro-democracy candidate.

Since social media in its current form did not exist at the time of the Orange Revolution, the revolutionaries only set a precedent for others to follow by organizing online and taking

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[21] Joshua Goldstein, "The Role of Digital Networked Technologies in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution," *The Berkman Center for Internet & Society*, Research Publication No. 2007-14, December 2007, accessed February 18, 2013, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1077686.

advantage of new technologies as they developed. Moldova's revolt ushered in the era of using social media to organize protests against a government.

In April 2009, thousands of young protesters gathered in Chisinau, Moldova, the nation's capital, to voice their anger over the Communist Party's victory in an election. Word of the protests spread through the use of Twitter. This movement became the first christened as a "Twitter Revolution," as protesters used Twitter and Facebook to raise awareness of the Communist Party's victory and to stimulate the opposition to rally against the incumbent Communist Party. Through the use of social media, the angry youth movement was able to amass approximately 10,000 protesters in the main square of Chisinau and storm the parliament headquarters.[22]

Moldova makes an interesting first model for a social media-based revolution. Located in Eastern Europe, Moldova ranks as one of the poorest countries in the region and was not typically considered high-tech. Despite it being an unlikely contender for such a protest, Moldova's uprising perfectly highlights the dichotomy between the cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. In a rare display of cyber-optimism, Morozov believed that Twitter affected the range of events during this revolt. Writing for ForeignPolicy.com, he states: "If you asked me about the prospects of a Twitter-driven revolution in a low-tech country like Moldova a week ago, my answer would probably be a qualified 'no.' Today, however, I am no longer as certain." Pointing to lowered barriers for organization, Morozov says "Technology is playing an important role in facilitating these protests. In addition to huge mobilization efforts both on Twitter and Facebook,

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[22] Evgeny Morozov, "Moldova's Twitter Revolution," *Net Effect/ForeignPolicy.com*, April 7, 2009, accessed February 18, 2013, http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/04/07/moldovas_twitter_revolution.

Moldova's angry youth – especially those who are currently abroad . . . could follow the events on [an online livestream] . . . directly from the square."[23]

Meanwhile, a writer for the *Washington Post*, Anne Applebaum, wisely refused to be caught up in the initial tide of enthusiasm over a backwater country taking on its government. Applebaum writes:

> It sounded too good to be true - - and it was. Alas, it is becoming clear that there was no Twitter Revolution in Moldova, and not merely because there are only a handful of registered Twitter users in the country. The more important point, according to observers there, is that the unexpectedly large demonstration (10,000 to 15,000 is a lot for apathetic Moldova) was not a spontaneous product of technical advance . . . . The Moldovan opposition isn't well organized or popular enough to inspire a movement like that, with or without Twitter. More to the point, some of the most violent demonstrators were immediately identified, by Western observers and local politicians, as members of the Moldovan security forces.[24]

Therefore, much of what transpired in Moldova was not based on Twitter use but rather spread by word of mouth in an uprising that was quickly suppressed by government forces.

Applebaum highlights two good points, first, that the number of actual Twitter users in Moldova was relatively small. For a revolution to truly be a "Twitter Revolution," it helps to have a sizeable population utilizing the service to further the insurrection. In Moldova, it fell to a small number of people to organize and promote the protests. Furthermore, much of the violence was instigated by the security forces, not the protesters who started peacefully by standing with lit candles in the square. The security forces twisted the disposition of the peaceful march in an effort to discredit the nonviolent movement. However, Morozov correctly emphasizes the facilitation and amplification aspects of social media. Twitter and Facebook were indispensable in that regard.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Anne Applebaum, "The Twitter Revolution That Wasn't," *Washington Post*, April 21, 2009, accessed February 18, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-04-21/opinions/36882813_1_moldovan-vladimir-voronin-demonstrators.

Moldova's attempted rebellion against the Communist Party easily falls into the category of requiring a realist lens to understand the effect social media had on the revolt. Facebook and Twitter went a long way in spreading the word about the initial peaceful flash mob and keeping the Moldovans abroad engaged in the protest. However, due to the meager number of technologically inclined citizens and the lack of any real change in the government despite the protests, no foundation exists for labeling Moldova a "Twitter Revolution." This seems to be a construct begun by journalists as a catchy title to an article, with no basis in reality, as many Moldovans were not Twitter users. It is, however, clearly a case of Moldovans using every available means to reach fellow citizens and unite in a show of protest against the government.

Iran suffered a similar fate the same year. In June 2009, Iran held presidential elections with official results granting incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a second term. Following this election, many Iranian citizens believed the vote was rigged by Ahmadinejad to secure a second term despite a strong anti-incumbent mood in Iran. In the wake of the election, citizens supporting the opposition candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, started orchestrating anti-government protests. Known as the Green Movement, also named for color theme of Mousavi's campaign, these demonstrations showcased the Iranians' discontent with incumbent Ahmadinejad. As with the protests in Moldova, some Iranians turned to online services to organize and implement physical protests.

However, when examined closer, the use of social media such as Twitter, during the Green Movement, one finds that many of the tweets about the Iran election were tweeted not by Iranian citizens located in Iran, but by Iranian nationals living outside of the country. This occurred for two reasons. One, the Iranian government effectively slowed or shut down the Internet within Iran, blocking access to websites such as Twitter. Without Internet connectivity,

tweeting becomes impossible. Two, Iranians not living in their home country desperately wanted to share their country's troubles with the rest of the world to generate an understanding of the issues facing Iran.

This effort to increase awareness and understanding of events abroad can be compared to the many diasporas worldwide that campaign for issues their homeland. Such diasporas include the Jewish diaspora lobbying politicians in the United States as the nation of Israel was being created and the Irish-Americans' crusade to draw attention to the Irish Troubles in the 1990s. In each instance, the international diaspora worked to direct attention to a nation of people and their issues. This is indicative of the strong ties cited by Gladwell as being a crucial link in the chain reaction in these movements.

Nazila Fathi, a former reporter with the *New York Times*, covered the Green Movement on the ground in Iran and discovered two significant details. First, on-the-street protesters had never heard of Twitter; therefore, protesters were not sending tweets from the demonstrations. Second, Fathi found that "Twitter played an important role in reflecting Iran's events outside the country and showing the immense gap between society and the government. Without those lines, exposed to everyone and everywhere, the West would not have known the depth of people's resentment toward the regime. This reality changed the regime's international standing." [25] These two points, combined with the important realization that the tweets circulating appeared in English and not Farsi, Iran's national language, demonstrate that the situation in Iran was far more complicated than many understood. [26] Indeed, it was a web of discontent of a community across multiple states. The graph below depicts the number of tweets relating to each relevant

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[25] Nazila Fathi, "Dispatches From an Unfinished Uprising: The Role of Technology in the 2009 Iranian Green Movement," *Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy,* Discussion Paper Series #D-75, August 2012, accessed January 24, 2013, http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/d74_fathi.pdf.
[26] Esfandiari.

subject during the Iranian election, but the tweeted terms are in English, illustrating the fact that many tweets about Iran's election were not in Farsi.
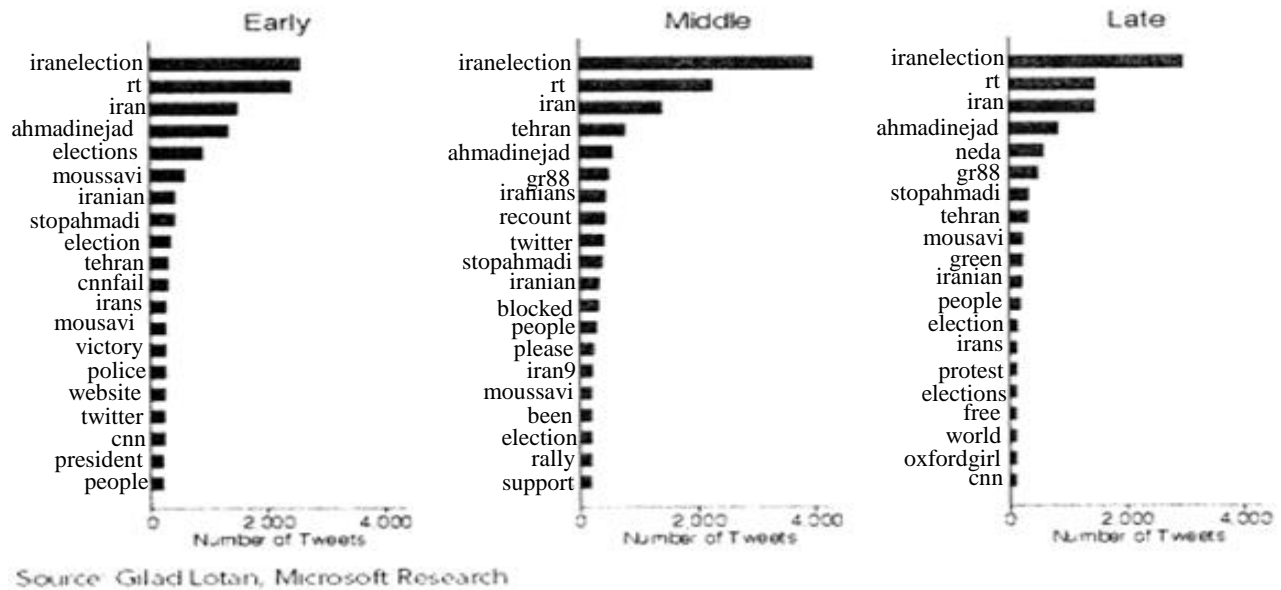

Source: Gilad Lotan, Microsoft Research

Figure 1: Number of tweets citing each term (June 12-30, 2009). [27]

It is too facile and too utopian to credit Twitter and other social media with causing a revolution in Iran. Besides, the protesters were unable to oust President Ahmadinejad from power, a clear indicator that this did not amount to a revolution, much less a social media based one. As Gladwell might point out, most of the work was done by the people in the streets, chanting, expressing their dissent against the person they perceived to have rigged a vote to ensure retention of power.

However, Twitter did fill a key gap in knowledge. As Iranians outside of Iran turned to Twitter to post messages about the uprisings, the rest of the world gained a window into the turmoil in Iran. The dearth of tweets that tied into the Iran election shone a spotlight on a previously shadowed regime and as a result, the Iranian government's international standing

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[27] Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, John Kelly, and Ethan Zuckerman, "Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics," *PeaceWorks*, No. 65, August 2010, accessed December 31, 2012, http://www.usip.org/files/resources/pw65.pdf.

suffered. Despite this vital function as a megaphone broadcasting the issues, the role of social media, Twitter in particular, clearly became over-hyped. As Fathi points out: "Even though the role of Twitter inside the country was exaggerated, it played a major role telling the western audience what was happening inside the country. It laid bare the depth and scale of dissent in the country and became a source of embarrassment for the regime."[28] This inaccurate view of social media's power in uprisings laid a foundation for other protests that followed, especially in the Middle East, as fellow dissidents relied on new technology to further their cause, while over-inflating the responsibility of social media.

The Arab Spring: Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Libya

Early in 2011 through the springtime saw much upheaval in the Middle East. It started in Tunisia with a disgruntled fruit vendor setting himself on fire and spread to Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, and beyond. In each country, the sequence of events differed and so did the function of social media. In Tunisia, the self-immolating fruit vendor's cousin recorded the scene and the video quickly went viral, meaning that it spread from person to person rapidly through the video service YouTube, with citizens sharing the link to video through Facebook posts and Twitter messages, along with the more traditional email and text/video messages.

From there the revolutionary spirit expanded to Egypt, first with the creation of a Facebook page expressing solidarity with their Tunisian comrades, then other pages uniting Egyptians against their repressive regime. As citizens throughout the Middle East rose up against their government, others in the region first supported their neighbors and then caught on to the desire to attempt change in their traditionally repressive regimes. As the following graph

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[28] Fathi.

illustrates, many of the messages tweeted showed countries supporting their neighbors as each

country achieved some measure of success.
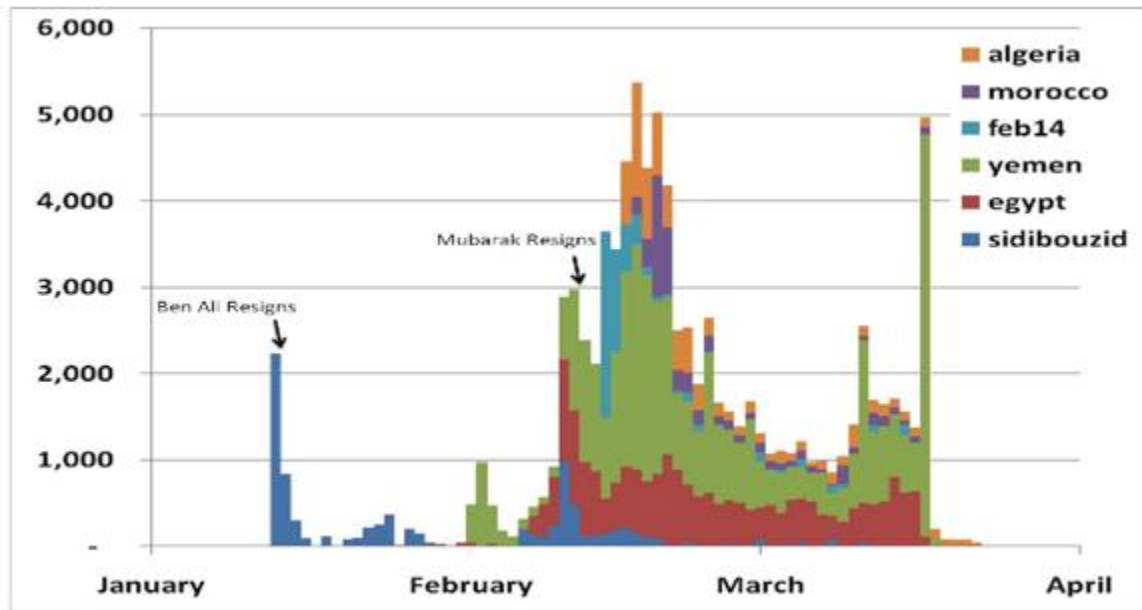
Notes: These are the hashtags that most prominently came to be associated with political uprisings in Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia, Morocco and Yemen. The hashtags analyzed, in order, were "#algeria," "#egypt", "#feb14", "#morocco", "#sidibouzid" and #yemen."

Figure 2: Number of Tweets in the Region using Hashtags for Neighboring Countries. [29]

As their government was the first to fall, Tunisians utilized the full range of social media

and Internet-based services, such as emails and blogs, to publicize their dissent and garner

support for the street protests outside of the government building. Research points to Twitter

being the most commonly used service for sharing information regarding protests and changes

within the government. As a research project focused on the role of social media in the Arab

Spring points out regarding the Tunisian revolts: "Twitter seems to have been a key tool in the

region for raising expectations of success and coordinating strategy. Twitter also seems to have

been the key media for spreading immediate news about big political changes country to country

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[29] Philip N. Howard, Aiden Duffy, Deen Freelon, Muzammil Hussain, Will Mari, and Marwa Mazaid, "Opening Closed Regimes: What was the Role of Social Media during the Arab Spring?" *Project on Information Technology & Political Islam*, 2011, accessed January 3, 2013, http://pitpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2011_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid_pITPI.pdf.

in the region."[30] This was the primary role of Twitter – to spread information and provide real-time updates.

However, Tunisians were also the first to learn how governments respond to direct threats from their populations. In the midst of the protests, the Tunisian government interfered with communication networks, causing a steep decline in the number of tweets sent from users within Tunisia. The blue bar indicates when reports began putting the number of protesters in the streets in the thousands, which roughly corresponds to when the security forces began manipulating connectivity. Once service was restored, the number of tweets once again soared. Philip N. Howard, et al, graphed this trend to show the pace of tweets before, during and after Ben Ali's ouster.
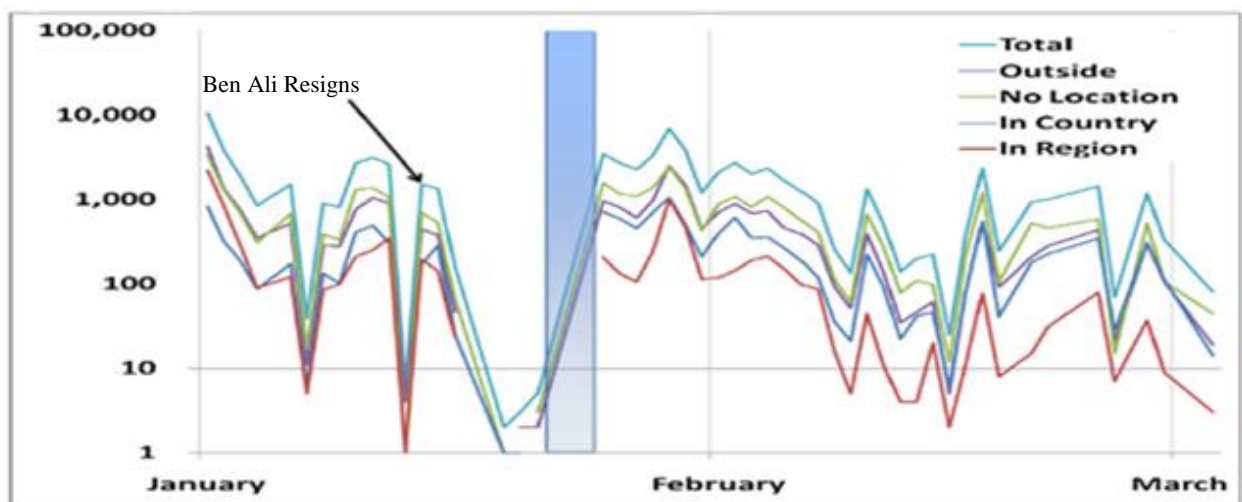
Notes: "Outside Country" refers to Twitter profiles that had locations outside both the country and the region, and "No Location" refers to profiles that either had no location data or have been deleted or suspended since archiving began. The blue bar indicates the period in which journalists began reporting that protests had reached the level of "thousands" of participants.

Figure 3: Logged Number of Tweets on #sidibouzid, by Location[31]

This graph also points to the large number of Twitter messages being sent from outside the country. Analyzed further, it is obvious that as Tunisians were unable to post about what was happening, then the stream of information was cut off to the rest of the world. When the

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

Tunisians stopped tweeting, so did the rest of the region, even though it is unlikely that their communication services experienced similar disruptions.

Consequently, the Tunisian example validates Shirky's optimism as well as Gladwell's pessimism. Twitter clearly constituted an important element in the flow of information within the country and the region. However, the government caught on very quickly to how the protesters were organizing and sharing details and subsequently impeded access to Internet connections. When both the positive and negative aspects are considered together, a different reality appears. Tunisia remains in turmoil, with the government appointing a succession of prime ministers since Ben Ali's resignation and an opposition leader recently assassinated outside his home in Tunis.[32] Despite attempts to champion social media as a herald of political change, social media ultimately failed to live up to the hype, unable to stand against a government willing to shut down Internet connectivity in a bid to maintain power.

Egypt's story is strikingly similar, but with an added twist. When the Egyptian government shut off the Internet and blacked out cell phone service, the general public, in search of information, took to the streets, participating in the exact behavior the government tried to prevent. As one researcher of the media disruption during Egypt's rebellion notes: "Meanwhile apolitical strata of the Egyptian society, aggrieved by the disruption, were pushed into joining the confrontation. Instead of protests only in and around Tahrir Square, sizeable demonstrations appeared in many locations in Cairo."[33] The connectivity interruption had an effect opposite of what President Hosni Mubarak wanted. It increased the size of protesting crowds, drawing out people who sought information about what was happening. Had the government not turned off

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[32] "Tunisia PM Ali Larayedh unveils new government," *BBC News Africa*, March 8, 2013, accessed March 11, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21711345.

[33] Navid Hassanpour, "Media Disruption Exacerbates Revolutionary Unrest: Evidence from Mubarak's Natural Experiment," *APSA 2011 Meeting Paper*, August 7, 2011, accessed January 25, 2013, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1903351.

the Internet, perhaps citizens would have remained uninvolved.
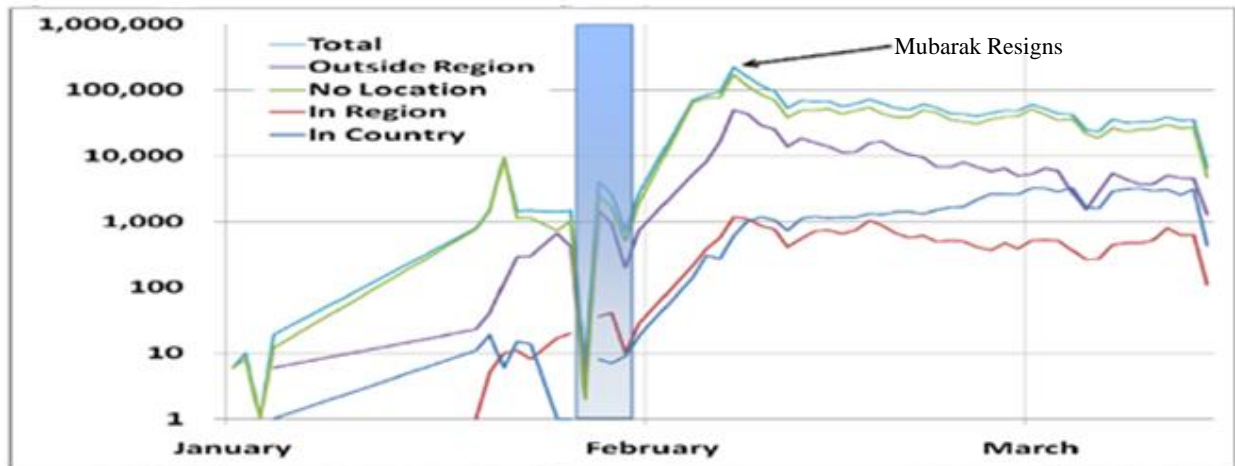
Notes: "Outside Region" refers to Twitter profiles that had locations outside both the country and the region, and "No Location" refers to profiles that either had no location data or have been deleted or suspended since archiving began. The blue bar indicates the period in which journalists began reporting that protests had reached the level of "thousands" of participants.

Figure 4: Logged Number of Tweets on #egypt, by Location[34]

Yet, Egyptians got involved, and they found ways around the Internet blackout. Again,

the above graph illustrates the use of Twitter to broadcast on-the-ground information to people

far removed from the situation. This sustained much of the national and international attention

bestowed on the movement. Also, as the graph shows, many of the tweets came from within the

country and the region. Those who do not list a location chose to do so to avoid detection by a

government willing to kidnap dissidents in an effort to maintain control of the country.

Egypt's security forces kidnapped several protesters throughout the course of the

uprising, but the most prominent capture was Wael Ghonim, an Egyptian Google employee

based in the United Arab Emirates, who returned home to fight for his country's freedom from

the oppressive Mubarak. A few days into the protest, security forces arrested and detained

Ghonim for several days. As the administrator of the We Are All Khaled Said page, and an avid

social media user, he made a perfect target for the security forces. Beyond his social media

savvy, lay a deep knowledge of computer programming that allowed Ghonim to mask many of

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[34] Howard, et al.

his online movements, as he attempted to avoid recognition by the security forces. During his time in prison, the rebellion grew and eventually achieved its main goal, the ouster of President Mubarak. Despite Ghonim's initial optimistic declaration that Facebook catalyzed the revolution, he recognizes: "Yet revolutions are processes and not events, and the next chapter of this story is only beginning to be written."[35] Egypt and Tunisia are still undergoing much political change, as are many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Bahrain and Libya followed in the footsteps of Tunisia and Egypt as two less obvious sources of revolutionary tumult.

In his book *Distant Witness*, Andy Carvin, a strategist for National Public Radio (NPR), gives a play-by-play of events leading to each revolution in the Middle East. He tracks the fall of regimes from Tunisia to Egypt to Bahrain and Libya and on to the still-on-going civil war in Syria. As Carvin states: "Learning from the experiences of Tunisia and Egypt, these activists began to adopt similar tactics: creating Facebook pages, identifying ways of accessing the Internet if their government tried to shut it down, and so on."[36] Citizens in Bahrain and Libya began to wage their own revolts. However, despite learning quick lessons from Egypt and Tunisia, people in Bahrain and Libya continue to struggle. Bahrain has seen no measurable change in the political arena, while it took NATO action to dispose of the hated Muammar Gaddafi.

The governments of these embattled countries also learned quickly. Gaddafi restricted access to the Internet well before his country began to experience unrest. In addition to interfering with Internet connectivity, Gaddafi also dispatched the greatest amount of firepower possible. Libya quickly devolved into a civil war that raged for months before opposition

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[35] Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, 292.
[36] Carvin, *Distant Witness*, 63.

soldiers caught, tortured, and killed Muammar Gaddafi.[37] Carvin highlights two countries that

went far beyond just shutting down the Internet. Bahrain bypassed the overt method of simply

shutting off the Internet, instead opting to hire an American public relations firm to create fake

Twitter accounts to spread pro-government propaganda. Meanwhile, Syria waited out the media

storm, increasing the level of violence after international attention waned.[38] Overall, the

sequence of events in the Middle East during the Arab Spring stresses the need for cyber-realism

as opposed to cyber-optimism or cyber-pessimism very well.

Yes, social media helped to organize protests, spread information about skirmishes on the

ground, and acted as a megaphone, directing the world's attention to the Middle East and North

Africa in a new way. Social media also motivated scores of people who previously felt apathetic

or apolitical, and became an important source of information. The graph below illustrates how

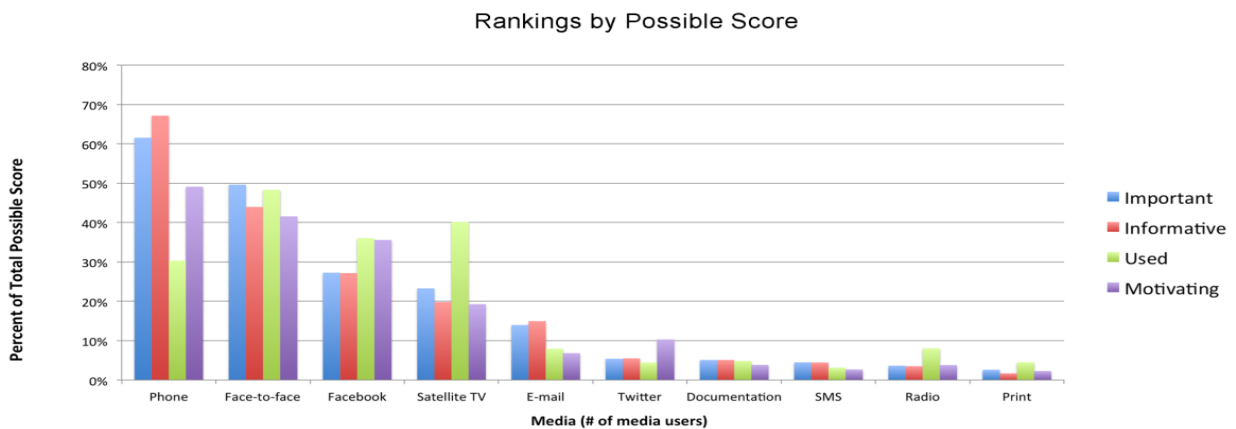effective each type of media was during the Egyptian uprising.

Figure 5: Ranking of Technology[39]

Clearly, social media figured prominently in the arena of information dissemination.

Facebook is third after the phone and face-to-face contact, while Twitter outpaces physical

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[37] Ibid, Chapter 3.

[38] Andy Carvin, ". . . And the Kitchen Sink Series: Distant Witness" (presentation, St. Louis Public Radio, St. Louis, Missouri, March 21, 2013).

[39] Christopher Wilson and Alexandra Dunn, "Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Set," *International Journal of Communication* 5, (2011): 1248-1272, accessed December 20, 2012.

documentation, text messages, radio, and print media. Both Twitter and Facebook also show a high degree of motivation, use, and importance. These figures give a reason to be optimistic about the future of social media, especially in typically repressed regimes. When used frequently and when users circumvent any connection blackouts, social media can provide citizens with a space to unite and effect change.

However, when the statistics are put aside and the current situation is assessed, a different reality emerges. As previously noted, Tunisia's government is still in disorder; Egypt's government is in a similar state of turmoil. Each country's leaders took steps to oppose the protesters, through information blackouts and propaganda tactics. Governments actively attempt to erase the memory of the various instances of unrest. As a *New York Times* writer describes: ". . . in Bahrain, where the authorities have tried to wipe away the memory of the uprising there, renaming the roundabout where the protesters gathered and sealing it off with soldiers. Traffic no longer flows though Tahrir Square in Cairo. It is filled with tents that feel ever more permanent and suggest a chaotic impasse."[40] This reality reveals the limits of social media. It acted as a useful tool, but nothing would have ever happened without the people behind the social media. As one Egyptian tweeted after the overthrow of Mubarak, "Yes, social media played a role in #jan25. But don't call this the Twitter or FB [Facebook] revolution. Real people protested and died. It's theirs."[41] The Arab Spring is not the only example. Similar parallels can be seen in Latin America as well.

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[40] Kareem Fahim, "Revolution and Its Aftermath Play out on an Avenue That Defines a City," *New York Times*, March12, 2013, accessed March 12, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/13/world/africa/tunis-journal-a-front-row-seat-for-an-uprising.html?ref=world&_r=0.
[41] Carvin, *Distant Witness,* 51.

Latin America: Colombia, Mexico, and Chile

It is important to consider other regions and political changes besides the Middle East during the Arab Spring. The analysis of this debate cannot rest on one region of the world alone. Latin America makes an interesting and relevant case study because its political upheavals have not reached the mainstream news the way the Arab Spring did. While protests in Latin America were also aimed at the status quo, they did not result in any level of violence such as in the Middle East. In one of the earliest instances, social media was engaged for organization against Colombia's terrorist cell, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), in 2008.

While FARC is not a governmental body, outrage has been directed at the terrorist organization for its continued policy of kidnapping Colombian citizens. Almost as soon as Facebook was introduced to Colombia, people began using it as a tool for protesting against FARC. In 2008, FARC was estimated to hold as many as 3,000 hostages, making Colombia the kidnapping capital of the world.[42] In protest, Colombian citizens rallied through a Facebook group called One Million Voices Against FARC. What started as a cadre of youth expressing their anger and frustration on Facebook expanded into an international multi-city march against the FARC. As another *New York Times* writer explains: "On Feb. 4, millions of Colombians marched simultaneously in 27 cities throughout the country and 104 major cities around the world shouting 'No more kidnappings! No more lies! No more deaths! No more FARC!' " Marches were reportedly held throughout Latin America as well as Europe, Asia, and the United States. The *Times* writer also quotes the organizer, Oscar Morales, as saying "I thought it was

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[42] Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Facebook used to Target Colombia's FARC with Global Rally," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 4, 2008, accessed February 18, 2013, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2008/0204/p04s02-woam.html.

going to be something unimportant, but little by little it became a big mobilization. Thanks to Facebook, we have created an exponential effect."[43]

As this anecdote exemplifies, social media can increase participation and awareness on a large scale. Without the use of Facebook, the international marches against FARC would have never happened. It helped bring international attention to a terrorist movement in a largely ignored Latin American country. There is enormous potential for similar actions to be taken against terrorist organizations, repressive governments, and other militant associations. Furthermore, taking action and speaking out in opposition to these groups can help a society, providing a way to unite a population that has lived in fear.

However, despite the apparent international success of the marches against FARC, it does not take very long to realize that these protests should not be defined as global. Researchers from the University of Salzburg factor in the Human Development Index developed by the United Nations, finding that:

> The distribution of cities shows that the protest was not global in terms of including all parts of the world. Only those countries where access to the Internet and use of social networking technologies is already common participated in the rallies. The correlation of the Human Development Index and those cities where the rallies against FARC took place suggests that even in geographical terms the protest was formed by a global elite. Taking this into account we can assume that the inherent social structures are reflected in cyberspace and a huge part of society is still excluded.

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[43] Maria Camilla Pérez, "Facebook Brings Protest to Colombia," *New York Times*, February 8, 2008, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/business/worldbusiness/08iht-protest11.html.
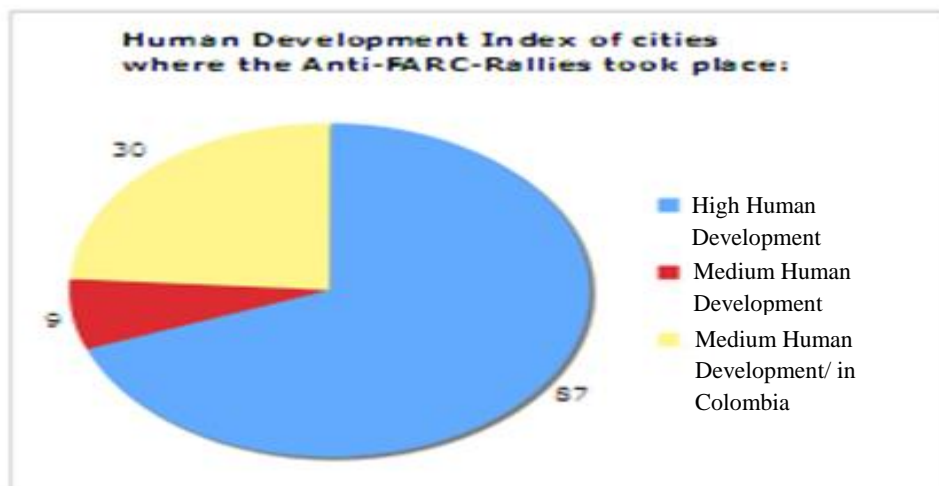
Figure 6: Human Development Index of Cities where the Anti-FARC Rallies Took Place[44]

In addition, the terrorist group is still kidnapping Colombian citizens, regardless of the nation's outspoken criticism of its actions. Again, just last month the *New York Times* reported: "The recent kidnappings of two police officers in Colombia by the country's largest rebel group [FARC] have cast a shadow over peace talks between the rebels and the government, disheartening a nation weary of the decades-old conflict."[45] Any pessimist would point to social media achieving zero effects on FARC's actions, while the optimist would highlight the international attention brought to the subject of FARC kidnappings. Realistically, both sides are correct. As in the Middle East, this trend continues in Latin America. Mexico and Chile have also recently seen an increase in protest activity.

While both Mexico and Chile currently have democratic governments, they also have a dark history of dictatorship and authoritarianism. The ghost of Augusto Pinochet haunts Chile to

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[44] Christina Neumayer and Celina Raffl, "Facebook for Global Protest: The Potential and Limits of Social Software for Grassroots Activism," *ICT&S Center, University of Salzburg*, Prato CIRN 2008 Community Informatics Conference: ICTs for Social Inclusion: What is the Reality? Refereed Paper, 2008, accessed February 18, 2013, http://pep-forums.990086.n3.nabble.com/file/n2539001/2008-Neumayer-Raffl-Facebook_protest_FARC.pdf.
[45] William Neuman, "Kidnappings Imperil Talks with Rebels in Colombia," *New York Times*, February 2, 2013, accessed March 16, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/world/americas/colombia-kidnappings-cast-pall-over-talks-with-farc.html.

this day, while Mexico continually tries to fight off the power monopoly of the Institutional

Revolutionary Party (PRI). These two countries represent a slightly different case study.

Whereas Colombia, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Bahrain have all been victims of deep-rooted

authoritarian regimes whose denizens tired of repression, Mexican and Chilean citizens are

speaking out about corruption and myriad social issues that tend to plague democratic societies.

Protests in these countries air grievances related to education systems, economic issues, drug

wars, and political corruption, which are no less important to those countries.

In Mexico, public demonstrations took aim at the recently elected president, Enrique

Peña Nieto, in response to elections that some felt were fraudulent. Many of the protesters were

students who created the Yo Soy 132 (I am 132) movement after Peña Nieto accused a group of

students of working for the opposition after they stormed a pre-election speech. The students'

angry comeback came in the form of a YouTube video showing their student IDs, with a Twitter

tag (#YoSoy132) following close behind. The video spread quickly, and the Twitter tag used to

organize marches and vigils in the days leading up to the election. After the election went to

Peña Nieto, the students turned their anger on media oligarchies in Mexico.

This example differs greatly from the rest examined thus far. It may seem far removed

from the experiences in the Middle East, but it is no less instructive. Social media now permeates

daily lives throughout industrialized societies. Like the Colombians, people are starting to catch

on to its multiple functions, fostering interpersonal connections as well as working to change the

status quo, whether that is acting against a government oppressor or a terrorist organization. As

Allison Kilkenny writes for *The Nation* magazine and website:

> Yo Soy 132 might confuse some observers, just as Occupy baffled many witnesses,
> because it's a general rejection of the status quo. That big, ambitious agenda of rejecting
> huge institutions such as corporate media could overwhelm many, which explains why

the initial reaction to these kinds of movements is hostility and belittlement. Many may subconsciously feel it's easier to mock than to join and fail, or be crushed by police.

Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II summarized to the *LA Times* why these kinds of youth-led revolutions are always a good thing for a nation that has grown complacent in its corruption: "The real miracle is that a complete generation that was condemned to apathy, to only observe, and to individualism, is once again making the nation's destiny their own."[46]

This movement in Mexico ties into what has been happening in Chile as well. Latin Americans are shedding their apathy and beginning to take an active role in political life.

Academic research on the recent uptick in political protests in Chile shows that "Political action movements in Third Wave democracies have had three elements in common: the dominant role of youth; the absence of political parties as the main organizers; and the widespread use of social media as means of political action."[47] Researchers from Chilean universities found a positive relationship between using Facebook and protest behavior. This research is born out not just in the case of Chile, but can also be seen in the Mexican protests and the Arab Spring. The majority of protesters, especially as the movements began, are young people acting outside of any political affiliation. Citizens around the world have grown weary of political repression, whether the brutal oppression of the Middle East or the rampant corruption in Latin America. These discontented netizens then take advantage of their technology savvy to effect change.

The Chilean researchers also note: "Using Facebook more frequently meant engaging in all three of the Facebook activities [news consumption, expressing opinions, and socializing with

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[46] Allison Kilkenny, "Student Movement Dubbed the 'Mexican Spring,'" *The Nation*, May 29, 2012, accessed January 24, 3013, http://www.thenation.com/blog/168099/student-movement-dubbed-mexican-spring.

[47] Sebastián Valenzuela, Arturo Arriagada, and Andrés Scherman, "The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior: The Case of Chile," *Journal of Communication*, 2012, accessed December 20, 2012, doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01635.x.

peers] considered more frequently as well. Most importantly, using Facebook for news and socializing was positively associated with protest levels."[48]

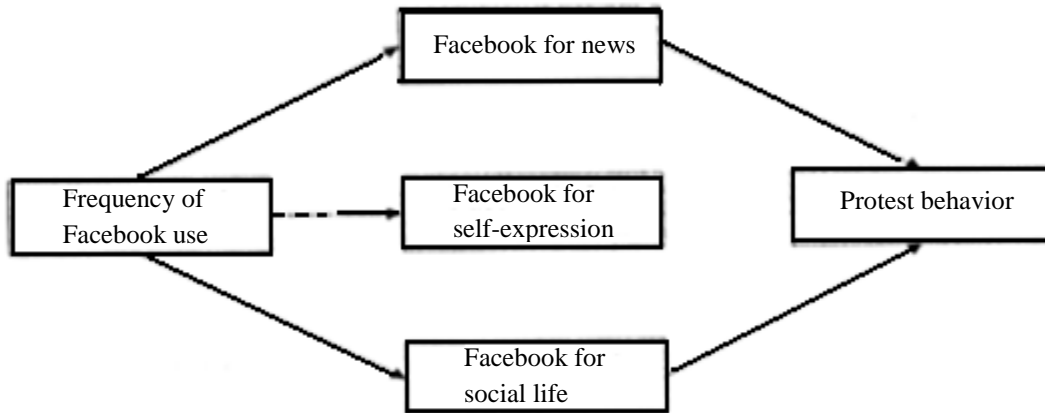**The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior**

Figure 7: Path Model of Facebook Use and Protest Behavior

This research points to a promising future for the use of social media to foment political change. Consequently, it cannot be discounted when pessimists insist that social media is not the basis for any sort of revolution. As Alexei Barrionuevo of the *New York Times* quotes Chilean student, Eduardo Beltrán: "The whole country is watching this movement. The generation of our parents, is watching us with hope, with faith that we have the strength to change this education system and make history." Barrionuevo also writes: "The sentiments have been building for years, but have begun spilling out only recently. . . Mr. Piñera [Chile's right-wing president] noted that Chileans were witnessing a 'new society' where people 'feel more empowered and want to feel they are heard.' "[49]

Like those in Colombia and the Middle East, Chileans find that the online sphere is a safe place to vent and organize, leading to physical demonstrations to voice their concerns in public.

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[43] Ibid.

[49] Alexei Barrionuevo, "With Kiss-ins and Dances, Young Chileans Push for Reform," *New York Times*, August 4, 2011, accessed March 16, 2013,
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/05/world/americas/05chile.html?ref=alexeibarrionuevo.

These uprisings are powered by the youth, those who are comfortable with the technology and already utilize it in their everyday life. Shirky emphasized this as an integral part of what makes social media an ideal foundation for change. The case of Chile is one of the most optimistic thus far, but lest the rose-colored glasses return, responses to these upheavals must be considered. One look at how China, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan handle dissent and the pessimistic perspective will seem at the very least, on target.

Government Countermeasures: China and Eastern Europe

How a government reacts to displays of collective action betrays a regime's weaknesses and fears. In the Middle East, the predominate reaction was to shut down or slow Internet speeds to prevent revolutionaries from organizing via online methods such as Facebook and Twitter or viewing video footage on YouTube of the extreme violence exerted by the regimes in response to the revolts. Bahrain fought back more creatively, spreading pro-government messages through social media. These actions underscore the lengths these administrations were willing to go to maintain power. However, when compared with the stringent measures enacted by China to govern the Internet, simply shutting down the Internet seems rudimentary.

Out of 179 ranked countries, China ranks 174 in press freedom, which includes access to, and content of, the Internet.[50] This statistic proves that despite the increasing diffusion in Internet use across China, the policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continue to prevent unfettered access to information. Many policies exist which persist in the censoring, blocking and banning of websites and content. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are banned in China, which led to the creation of homegrown social media sites. However, regulators monitor these

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[50] "Press Freedom Index 2011-2012," *Reporters without Borders*, accessed December 8, 2012, http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html.

social media sites extremely closely, subjecting the sites to intense censoring policies. Therefore, the social media landscape in China differs greatly from the rest of the world.

The CCP actively engages in censorship of websites, including social media sites, and encourages high levels of self-censorship by the public. This tactic is achieved through the employment of people whose sole job it is to monitor and react to content posted online, with some individual websites mobilizing up to 1,000 censors. If websites fail to comply with government censorship guidelines, they may be fined or shut down entirely. To control private censors, the government has created an Internet police force of 20,000 to 50,000 members. The CCP also pays party members to monitor online content and to post party-favorable messages, the so-called "50-cent party members," known as such for the amount they are paid per favorable post. [51] These are just some of the stringent measures in place at the behest of the CCP regarding Internet regulation and oversight.

China's censoring measures extend beyond the human element to include numerous technological means of blocking and censoring. Referred to as the "Great Firewall," an online barrier blocks all content that the CCP deems unsuitable for Chinese civilian consumption. This scheme covers not just web pages, but online newspapers, all outside websites, and social media. These techniques enable China to prevent access to sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Not only does the CCP engage in these overt and strict methods of censorship, which encourage self-censorship, it also reacts harshly to breaches in policy.

When a Chinese netizen violates the code of self-censorship conduct, the government tends to overreact, historically punishing people through jail sentences or re-education through forced labor. One man was released in April 2012 after being required to complete a one-year re-education term as punishment for his "crudely satirical Weibo post" about Bo Xilai, a high-

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[51] Gary King, et al.

ranking government official recently removed from duty due to a multitude of scandals. Another netizen was detained shortly before the 18th Party Congress in November 2012 for "spreading false and terrible information [online]." As of November 19, 2012, he had not yet been released.[52] These represent just a small number of the examples of the lengths the CCP is willing to go to repress the Chinese and restrict access to information, all in the name of retaining ultimate power over the country. The CCP strives to control the information flow as means to control its citizens. However, as Chinese netizens catch on to the ways of the CCP, there is ever-increasing public backlash.

The response the CCP fears the most is collective action. In these cases, Internet protests move from relatively harmless, if offensive to government sensibilities, online postings to physical demonstrations against government targets. This intense fear of public revolt has led the CCP to focus its censorship policy on specific messages that indicate a high potential for collective action. These messages span a range of topics, from the praising of political dissidents, to discussions of economic policy, and arguments about the one-child policy. The common thread is the threat of citizens gathering in public to demonstrate en masse. This practice of targeted censorship is detailed by Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts in their paper "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression."

This research illustrates that the types of posts most often removed from websites and bulletin boards are those that are most likely to inspire public demonstrations. This extensive study of blogs, microblogs (Weibo posts), and bulletin boards proves that the majority of messages deleted are those that are likely to move offline and create a real-world protest. The graph below depicts the types of topics most likely to be censored by the CCP.

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[52] Samuel Wade, "Mixed News on Netizen Detentions," *China Digital Times*, November 19, 2012, accessed November 28, 2012, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2012/11/mixed-news-on-netizen-detentions/.
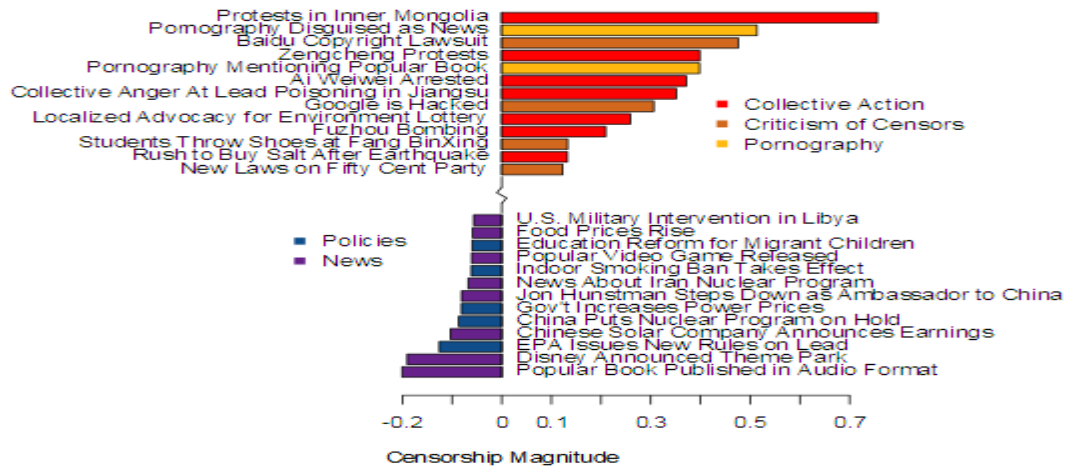
Figure 8: Events with Highest and Lowest Censorship Magnitude[53]

The CCP also endeavors to block content about certain subjects to defuse the potential for a mass gathering to escalate into a public revolt against the CCP. The CCP believes that if such missives are not quickly erased through the censorship process, then any sort of national crisis could spell the end of the Party's rule. If it weren't for the example cited earlier regarding the train crash in Wenzhou demanding the CCP's attention and forcing further investigation, the outlook on Chinese Internet access would be very bleak. That particular instance, along with a scant few others, allows for a small ray of hope. Those cases indicate that the CCP is not completely unwilling to listen to its constituents. Overall, though, the likelihood of social media breaking through the CCP's barriers is pretty low. While China reigns supreme in manipulating content and flow of information online, several other countries also strive to instill fear into their population to prevent similar uprisings.

Two countries in particular expend a great effort to keep their constituents from freely accessing information beyond what the governments want them to see, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, whose Internet policies have been studied in-depth. The results of these studies describe two regimes struggling to remain in power and willing to take extreme measures to

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[53] Gary King, et al.

maintain that power. Approaches to Internet control include technological and psychological means. Both governments manage to inculcate a sense of self-censorship within the Internet realm by making examples of dissenters and using the same technology to spread propaganda. As Morozov astutely points out: "The most effective system of Internet control is not the one that has the most sophisticated and draconian system of censorship, but the one that has no need for censorship whatsoever."[54] Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have managed just that.

In Uzbekistan, one researcher found: "The spread of social media and mobile phones has challenged state control over access to information through the internet in Uzbekistan, but has had little effect on political organization or mobilization. The control the Uzbek state wields over internet use is not only practical, but ideological and psychological." Despite purporting to favor a free and open Internet, with easy access to social media, Uzbekistan mirrors China by "promoting open access while justifying censorship under the pretext of protecting national values." If a citizen risks posting oppositional content, the National Security Service appears in person to harass, arrest, or beat the netizen. Others report obvious hacks on their personal social media pages and emails. The researcher distills it down to this: "the Uzbek government was not opposed to the internet — so long as the internet did not tell Uzbeks anything the government did not want them to know." This paradoxical attitude manifests itself in the government's use of Facebook. Security forces are able to easily track citizens through Facebook. Therefore, Facebook is not blocked in Uzbekistan, leading to the realization that, "Facebook is as beneficial for the Uzbek government as it is for Uzbeks, which may help explain why it has not been blocked."[55] This research is supported by further analysis of social media in Azerbaijan.

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[54] Morozov, *Net Delusion*, 58.
[55] Sarah Kendzior, "Digital Freedom of Expression in Uzbekistan: An example of social control and censorship in the 21st Century," *New America Foundation*, July 2012, accessed October 12, 2012, http://newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/KendziorFINAL7172012.pdf.

The researchers, from University of Washington and Washington University in St. Louis, approached the topic from a more pessimistic point of view. They demonstrate that political protests can be derailed through the use of social media to document and publicize suppressed dissent, especially in authoritarian regimes of the former Soviet Union. Katy E. Pearce and Sarah Kendzior believe that these nations represent a middle-of-the-road approach to the Internet and social media, between open access and censorship. These regimes exploit "problems of cynicism, insecurity, and trust particular to post-Soviet political culture." Following what Pearce and Kendzior call "networked authoritarianism," these governments embrace and adjust to the unavoidable changes brought about by new technology, such as social media.

Authoritarian regimes such as these infuse a sense of fear of reprisal in their citizens by making examples of dissenters. In Azerbaijan, two youth activists who published a parody video of the government on YouTube were attacked and when they lodged a complaint with the police, they were arrested for "hooliganism." When other citizens see fellow civilians arrested and beaten for expressing displeasure with the government, it deters them from also participating. These countries do not rely on technology as much as intimidation to coerce their constituents into behaving. The study found that "the government has successfully dissuaded frequent Internet users from supporting protest and average Internet users from using social media for political purposes." Pearce and Kendzior find this to be a unique technique of the former Soviet states because governments "officially laud Internet usage, but employ an iron fist against violators of these countries." However, there are parallels to China's attitude towards the Internet, as these countries "use the Internet to maximize surveillance of dissident populations and to block content from reaching the masses."[56]

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[56] Katy E. Pearce and Sarah Kendzior, "Networked Authoritarianism and Social Media in Azerbaijan," *Journal of Communication* 62, (2012), 283-298, accessed November 6, 2012, doi: 1031111/j.1460-2466.2012.01633.x.

However, to some degree, this is expected of authoritarian regimes. They thrive on

control and wield it to their advantage to maintain power. China has a long history of propaganda

and withholding information from its denizens, which now translates into blocking websites,

filtering content, and punishing protesters. In the former Soviet Union, many governments use

social media to shadow its citizens and punish dissenters as dissuasion against joining any

potential revolt. These actions are not out of character for these regimes. What is unexpected is

the extent to which democracies also intervene in Internet connectivity. A study by the

University of Washington found that out of 566 incidents of state interference in digital networks

involving 101 countries, 39 percent of those occurred in democracies.
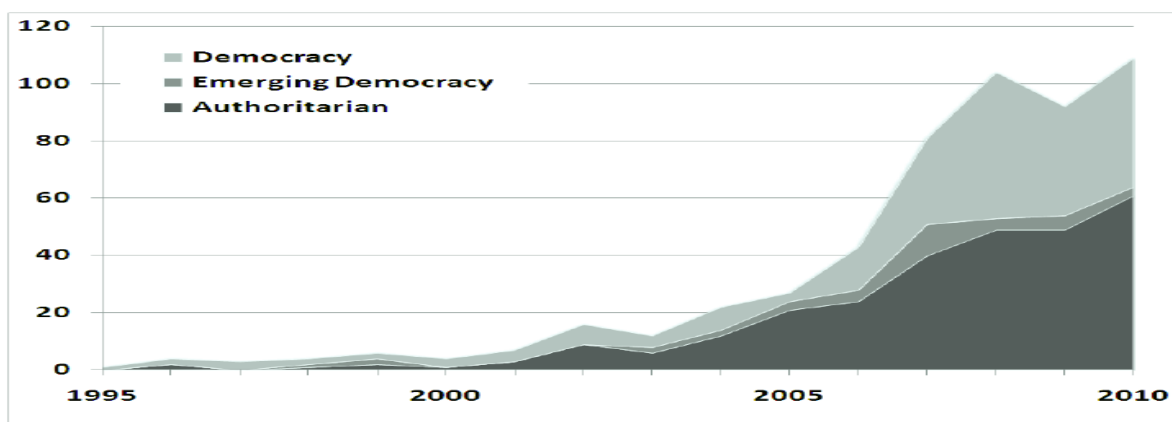
Note: Total N = 566. Current as of April 2011. Regime type attributed to the specific year in which incident was recorded.

Figure 9: Number of Major Incidents of State Intervention in Digital Networks.[57]

The researchers discovered two broad themes for why states disconnected access to

digital networks: protecting political authority and preserving the public good. Subcategories of

the first theme include protecting political leaders and state institutions; election crisis;

eliminating propaganda; mitigating dissidence; and national security. Subcategories for the

second are preserving cultural and religious morals; preserving racial harmony; protecting

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[57] Philip N. Howard, Sheetal D. Agarwal, and Muzammil M. Hussain, "When Do States Disconnect Their Digital Networks? Regime Responses to the Political Uses of Social Media," *University of Washington*, October 3, 2010, accessed January 10, 2013, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1907191.

children; cultural preservation; protecting individuals' privacy; and dissuading criminal activity. While many of these categories appear to mostly apply to non-democracies, as they are prone to these types of crises, the researchers point to an incident in the United States in 2009 in which police arrested two people for tweeting police locations during G20 protests in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.[58] Therefore, no country is immune from government intervention in civilian life for reasons directly related to social media usage.

On a global scale, social media has rapidly become more prevalent and extremely important in social and political life. With this explosion of connectedness comes concomitant government backlash, political issues, and policy decisions. As social media use continues to rise and engineers create new functionality, the future must be considered carefully. As with all types of mass communications, rules and regulations are imposed. Furthermore, these types of communication media have a global reach like none before, demanding judicious international policies. Governments with superior foresight need to enact foreign policies that will support the goal of information freedom throughout the world. If actions and policies are not created and enforced thoughtfully, it may, as Morozov predicts, spell disaster for many international concerns.

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[58] Ibid.

Chapter 3

The Future

Why is this debate between cyber-pessimism and cyber-optimism so important? This question plus the ones posed in the introduction, are vital questions to consider as the world becomes more technologically advanced. With technological progress comes a responsibility to understand the basis and reach of these technologies. These questions will be essential for policy-makers, governments, and the average citizen for the foreseeable future. So far, the following questions have been answered.

Did social media act as a harbinger of change in repressive and corrupt regimes?

Based on the numerous case studies presented, the answer is a resounding no. In each example, the true agents of change were the people who were fed up with their respective governments and chose to do something about it. The protesters in the Middle East who gave their lives are the true heroes of the Arab Spring. Those who found ways around government-imposed information black-outs are the ones responsible for keeping their fellow citizens and the world informed.

Social media was simply one of many tools employed in the battle against oppressive governments and the status quo in general. Morozov writes this remonstration: "[B]y focusing on technologies, as opposed to the social and political forces that surround them, one may be drawn to wrong conclusions."[59] This is exactly what happened with all of the revolutions labeled as Twitter or Facebook revolutions. Observers focused on the new technology and concluded that this new media had more of an effect than it really did. Obviously, this was an incorrect

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[59] Morozov, *Net Delusion*, 293.

conclusion. When judging future revolutions, one must consider the human, social, and political elements before labeling an uprising.

Has social media had an effect on issues exposed by these protests?

To some degree, yes. Social media lowered or even completely removed barriers to organization and communication in ways that were previously not possible. Social media also drew national and international media attention to issues across the globe. These attributes are in fact new and useful for citizens all over the world. It is likely that more uprisings and revolutions will coalesce through the use of social media as Facebook eases costs of organization, Twitter provides a platform for real-time updates, and YouTube disseminates a visual record of events. As Carvin emphatically stated in a presentation about social media and revolutions, "The role of social media can be overstated, but it can also be understated."[60] Social media clearly facilitated each of the protests examined, but social media is nothing without the people behind it.

How far will governments go to prevent citizen revolts?

The answer to this is truly disturbing. As can be seen from each case study, some autocratic governments have no qualms about keeping their country in the dark, literally and figuratively. Regimes in the Middle East slowed or shut-off not just Internet-based services, but also cell phone networks. Post-Soviet Union administrations use fear tactics to prevent their constituents from organizing against the repressors. China deploys a combination of technological mechanisms, human censors, and age-old propaganda schemes to thwart netizens from attempting to launch a Chinese Spring. Even democracies are willing to monitor and interfere with social media when in the interest of national security. Even worse, as two

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[60] Carvin presentation.

researchers point out: ". . . the very same technologies which give voice to democratic activists living under authoritarian rule can also be harnessed by their oppressors. Cybercommunication has made possible some very extensive and efficient forms of social control. Even in democratic countries, surveillance systems penetrate every aspect of life . . . ."[61] The range of government responses to this new technology thus raises this most important question.

How will social media shape the future?

The answer ties directly into the importance of this debate. No one has a crystal ball that can reveal the future. If the right questions are asked, and are framed properly, everyone involved, from policy-makers, to leaders, to average citizens, has a chance to make the future better.

Understanding the argument between cyber-optimism and cyber-pessimism will lead to a better framing of the important questions and resulting policies. If one extreme or the other is the sole focus, then much in the middle is lost. Furthermore, if the technology (in this case, social media) is considered without taking into account social and political factors, then incorrect conclusions can be drawn about the powers of technology. This has led to overstating the ability of social media to effect change, in any situation, not the least of which are the revolutions studied here. When these inaccurate conclusions are subsequently used as the basis for foreign policy, the results will be poor foreign policies. Hence the need for cyber-realism.

When realism forms the foundation for foreign policy aimed at the Internet and information freedom, it leads to more feasible goals and results. Furthermore, such policies would focus on regional, social, and political factors, and not just create blanket policies. Such

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[61] Ronald Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski, "Liberation vs. Control: The Future of Cyberspace," in *Liberation Technology: Social Media and the Struggle of Democracy*, eds. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 2012), 19.

overarching policies rarely work and are usually put in place based on optimism. The prime example is the confident belief that the Internet would open closed societies such as China, Vietnam, and Singapore, bringing democracy and freedom of information with it. After 20-plus years of Internet access in these countries, democracy has not taken root in any of those governments. Instead, these regimes have turned these technologies in their favor, tracking citizens, spreading propaganda, and punishing online dissenters.

Many dissenters are tracked and located through the use of a technology called "spyware." Most of the spy programs are developed and sold by Western countries, especially the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom. While many of these companies claim to only sell the technology to law enforcement officials, often the programs end up in the hands of repressive regimes. A study from the University of Toronto, on a particular piece of software called FinFisher, produced in the United Kingdom, found that this specific program had found its way to Bahrain, Egypt, Singapore, and Vietnam, among others. As the study states: "FinFisher has gained notoriety because it has been used in targeted attacks against human rights campaigners and opposition activists in countries with questionable human rights records."[62] Knowing where this technology originates and how oppressive countries take advantage of it is important because it directly affects the information policies conceived. If policy-makers are not fully aware of the implications of Western technology used for repressive purposes, it severely limits the effectiveness of any action aimed at human rights issues, freedom of information strategies, and reduces understanding of situations liked those discussed in this paper.

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[62] Morgan Marquis-Boire, Bill Marczak, Claudio Guarnieri, and John Scott-Railton, "You Only Click Twice: FinFisher's Global Proliferation," *University of Toronto*, March 13, 2013, accessed March 29, 2013, https://citizenlab.org/2013/03/you-only-click-twice-finfishers-global-proliferation-2/.

Therefore, as Morozov states:

> Cyber-realists would acknowledge that by continuing to flirt with Internet-centrism and cyber-utopianism, policymakers are playing a risky game. Not only do they squander plenty of small-scale opportunities for democratization that the Internet has to offer because they look from too distant a perspective, but they also inadvertently embolden dictators and turn everyone who uses the Internet in authoritarian states into unwilling prisoners.[63]

Consequently, while putting an emphasis on Internet freedom as part of foreign policy is important, it must be done with foresight and the understanding that there are numerous other factors involved. The spread of democracy is an admirable goal, but to achieve it, policies must be founded on realism, without over- or under-stating the power of technology, including social media.

Foreign policies are important because they form a basis of understanding the world. If shortsighted policies are created, then it will be more difficult to understand the world and the impetus behind any given movement, whether a violent revolution against a repressive dictator or a rebellion against a corrupt government. Placing such events in context allows for a better understanding of a rapidly shrinking world. Revolts in the Middle East affect issues in Latin America, which affect policies made in the United States. It is too utopian to credit social media as being the catalyst for uprisings around the world, yet a pessimistic view prevents the realization that these tools can in fact effect change. Social media may not rid the world of oppressive dictators, corrupt officials, or terrorist organizations, but they can empower a people to reject the status quo and fight for a better life.

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[63] Morozov, *Net Delusion*, 320.

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