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# Egyptian Diasporas, Social Media, and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: How Egyptians Living in Saudi Arabia used Social Media during the Revolution

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Egyptian Diasporas, Social Media, and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution:  
How Egyptians Living in Saudi Arabia used Social Media during the Revolution

Maisoon O. Al-sebaei

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

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Communications

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Dr. Haneya, and my father, Osama, for their infinite love, support, and prayers for me. Also I thank them for giving me the determination to extend the academic careers that they started many years ago. Without them, I could not have achieved my goals to study in the United State and to accomplish this thesis

I also dedicate this work to my husband, Assim, for his support and encouragement, since we came to the United States. To my children, Abdul-Aziz, for being a good son, and Abdul-Muhsin, who I gave birth to the day after I defended my thesis.

To my siblings, Yasir, Dr. Maisa, and Ahmed, for their optimism, assistance, encouragement, and patience. To my family, relatives, and friends for their devotion, support, and believing in me so that I could accomplish this work. Lastly, I would also like to dedicate this thesis to all Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia.

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## Abstract

In the last few years, the Arab world has been shifting to new technology, particularly social media, to create new connections and spaces for public engagement. This technology has opened new prospects in freedom of expression, especially in political reforms. Through the recent Arab Spring events, social media platforms have been helping cyberactivists for social changes. The 2011 Egyptian revolution is a prime example to show how social media platforms were used to ignite strikers and overthrow the autocratic regime. At the same time, the number and size of diasporas in the Middle East are increasing. Yet scholars have not explored how diasporic communities in the region are engaged with recent political changes, namely the Arab Spring.

This study reports the results of interviews with Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia during the 2011 Egyptian revolution in order to explore how that diaspora used social media platforms during that time. Grounded theory is used to analyze these interviews. The study concludes that social media was a proper platform for the Egyptian diaspora to collect new political information, connect with people in Egypt, and discuss and share it with people in their homeland and other communities. This Egyptian diaspora used social media to sustain strong ties to people in their homeland, increase their sense of political participation, and to confirm political activity in their homeland.

*Keywords:* Diapora, Expatriate, Egypt, Egyptians, Saudi Arabia, social media, Facebook, Twitter, cyber-politics

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Communication within and between members of a diaspora and their native community is a subject worthy of interest for communication scholars. Social media and digital technology in particular offer opportunities for collaboration between diasporas and their native countries and for political changes through the creation of new spaces and communities for exploring emotionally-charged issues in creative ways. Social media used by members of diasporas may change the meanings of community, political practices and processes, and citizenship. In fact there are numerous studies which discuss people who have experienced diasporas and how they use social media. These studies use a wide range of national examples, such as Iranians (e.g., Naghibi, 2011), Eritreans (e.g., Bernal, 2011), and Indians (e.g., Goswami, 2010) who are living in diasporas. Using social media, expatriates have worked for political change through methods that have included creating social media websites and using these websites to host blogs and foster awareness of what is going on in their home countries.

Many Egyptians find themselves part of one of diasporic communities. This is because many Egyptians emigrate from Egypt for better jobs or higher quality of life. They go through the process for many reasons, including high unemployment in their home country. The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics says that 11.9 percent of Egyptians in the first quarter of 2011 were unemployed compared to 8.9 percent in December 2010 (as cited in Feteha, 2011), and workers were suffering from low wages (Franklin, 2011). There are approximately eight million Egyptians living outside of their native Egypt (“Egypt Postpones Announcement,” 2012). Many of them are settled and working in Arabic and Gulf countries (“Expatriates and Egyptian workers,” 2011), for instance, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Currently, 70 percent of diasporic Egyptians are in the Arab region (“Egyptian remittances from

§Saudi Arabia,” 2012), and the largest segment can be found in Saudi Arabia (“Egyptian Diaspora's Dreams,” 2011). Specifically, more than 1.5 million Egyptians work in Saudi Arabia, and 150,000 of them came to the country after the 25 January revolution of 2011 (“Egyptian remittances from Saudi Arabia,” 2012).

The Egyptian revolution of 2011 was an important milestone in the history of Egypt. Egyptians had been without democracy for a long time. Moreover, they had suffered from corruption and unemployment. Using social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube), Egyptian activists deployed their technological savvy in order to instigate Egyptians to strike and take the streets against the ruling regime. Many Facebook pages and tweets were used to coordinate and mobilize demonstrations starting from January 25, 2011 through February 11, 2011, when then President Hosni Mubarak stepped down. Egyptians again used social media during the 2012 Presidential elections in order to advocate for and support their candidate.

### **Problem Statement**

While there is a consensus among a broad range of literature (e.g., Chebib & Sohail, 2011; Chorev, 2011; Cottle, 2011; Hounshell, 2011; Howard et al., 2011; Khamis, Gold, & Vaughn, 2012; Khondker, 2011; Russell, 2011) that social media played a pivotal role in the 2011 Egyptian revolution, little research has been conducted about the role of the Egyptian diasporas and their use of social media during that time. Since there are many Egyptians working and living with their families in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), which is the researcher’s country of origin, research was conducted in KSA to understand the activities of cyberactivist Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia during the uprising of 2011.



## **Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms are used in this research and defined in order to provide the reader with a full understanding of this study. These important terms are social media, revolution, diaspora, identity, and expatriate.

### *Definition of Social Media*

In 1997, social media was first introduced through the website SixDegrees.com. Six Degrees.com enabled users to create profiles, invite friends, and send messages to them. Starting in 2003, many social network sites (SNSs), such as MySpace and LinkedIn, were launched and since then have attracted millions of people (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In April 2011, Twitter had 175 million subscribers, and in August 2011, Facebook had 750 million users around the world (Chorev, 2011). According to Mayfield (2008), social media is “best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, community, connectedness” (p. 5). There are six basic kinds of social media: social networks, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Bebo; blogs, such as Tumbler; wikis, such as Wikipedia; podcasts, as found on Apple iTunes; forums; content communities, such as YouTube and Flickr; and micro-blogging, such as Twitter. Social media has a positive effect on our lives because it enables people to communicate despite the physical distance, to find good friends, debate, discuss, and share new information. Basically, “new ideas, services, business models and technologies emerge and evolve at dizzying speed in social media” (Mayfield, 2008, p.7).

### *Definition of Revolution or Uprising*

Many Arab countries have been lacking democracy for a long time; thus, many movements emerged in 2011 demanding political reform (Howard & Hussain, 2011). These

movements are known as *The Arab Spring*, *The Arab Uprising*, *The Arab Revolt*, or *The Arab Revolution* (in Arabic: الثورات العربية). The term Revolution is a wave of political protest and demonstrations against a ruling regime. In case of the Arab region, it started in Tunisia, spread out to Egypt, and went beyond to Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and other Arab countries (Bellin, 2012). Because protestors used social media, it is known as the *Facebook revolution* or *Twitter revolution* (Cottle, 2011). The Egyptian revolution is also called *the January 25 revolution*.

#### *Definition of Diaspora*

Diaspora can be defined as a community of people with traditional links who have become dispersed (Lewis, 1999). Generally, the term diaspora is used to refer to a group of people who share some type of common connection but are not living near their original homeland. This can occur voluntarily or involuntarily. As Goswami (2010) explains, “The term ‘diaspora’ is derived from the Greek word *diaspeirein*, which suggests the scattering of seeds and implies some description of dispersal” (p. 18).

This diasporic dispersal is a process of leaving the original native country but then still remaining loyal and connected to the original native country. Traditionally, “the classical form of diaspora relates to forced movement, exile, and consequent sense of loss derived from an inability to return” (Goswami, 2010, p. 18). For the Egyptians, the diaspora involves the process of Egyptians emigration, primarily for economic reasons that began around thirty years ago and continues into the present day.

#### *Definition of Identity*

Usually, diasporas is discussed in relation to concepts of identity. Therefore, in connecting the two ideas, it is important to understand that identity needs to be defined as a

social construction. Identities are made up of a unique combination of cultural reference points that combine in different ways for each and every individual. According to Petriglieri (2011), the concept of identity is tied to membership in a group, roles, characteristics, and traits. Human beings often hold more than one identity (Petriglieri, 2011). Furthermore, identity is tied to what aspects people value about themselves (Petriglieri, 2011).

### *Definition of Expatriate*

Expatriates are people who reside in a culture outside of the one that is their native culture. The expression expatriate describes a person who is living outside of their native geographic homeland. This is a more frequent occurrence in contemporary times because globalization has made the movements of money and jobs to exert a more powerful impact on people's day-to-day lives (Sassen, 1991). In many cases, money now has more power than governments when it comes to personal lives. People's desires to move to different countries for new jobs and also opportunities to do so have increased because of globalization (Sassen, 1991).

Along with this, the experience of being an expatriate is one that disrupts traditional connections: "As globalization pushes and pulls people across borders, it disrupts private and state modes of incorporation-family and citizenship" (Brysk & Shafir, 2004, p. 154). This helps demonstrate how diaspora and identity combine to allow for generalizations about the expatriate experience. The combination of diaspora and identity also helps to demonstrate how certain cultural identities, such as Egyptian identity, have particularly intense connections to their native homelands, especially when religion (Sunni Muslims and Coptic Christians), foods, family ties, and even sports create strong ties that link expatriate identity to the diaspora experience.

## **Thesis Organization**

This thesis is organized in five chapters. In the following chapter, a literature review is constructed by bridging the relation between social media, the Egyptian revolution of 2011, and diasporic Egyptians. The third chapter presents the methodology that was applied in this research. The chapter begins with a discussion about grounded theory and the lens of ethnography. Then, it elucidates how interview questions were generated and designed. The section then describes the sample of participants, including selection of sample procedure, recruiting participants, and sample size of the study, as well as the actual interview process. The fourth chapter presents the analysis of the interviews by applying the grounded theory approach. Chapter five offers a discussion about how the Egyptian diasporic community in Saudi Arabia used social media platforms to extract political news, communicate with Egyptians in the homeland, and to share new information. The chapter then provides some limitations of the research and suggests recommendations for further studies.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review examines social media, diasporas, and available literature relevant to understanding the role Egyptian expatriates living in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia played during the 2011 Egyptian revolution. These topics are explored from a range of perspectives in order to see how connecting through social media allowed for heightened and immediate communication. It starts with a deep discussion to allow the understanding of how social media played a major role in political changes and freedom of expression around the world and the Arab region. It rounds off with an examination of the use of social media before and during the Egyptian revolution of 2011, until Mubarak's resignation. Finally, studies about Egyptian diasporas and their role in the Egyptian revolution in 2011 are explored using social media studies. It is evident from this review of literature that more research is needed in order to help demonstrate the relation between Egyptians diasporas and their use of social media during the uprising.

### **The Internet Activism in the Western World**

By exploring numerous examples from the western world, the literature reviewed in this section describes how the internet and social media are used as a means of communication to call for political changes.

#### *The Use of Internet and Social Media for Political Changes*

Giroux (2009) asserts that the internet, including social media, has shaped politics and related to people's lives: "Text messaging, cell phone images, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and the internet have given rise to a reservoir of political energy that posits a new relationship between the new media technologies, politics and public life" (para. 4). To be sure, the new technology is used worldwide by activists for political changes and gave freedom of speech as

well. The use of the internet for political movements is not new. In 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico used new internet technology to demand their political goals with global supporters (Russell, 2011). Digital technologies have brought us new ways of communication. To be precise, Juris (2005) asserts that the internet is an “effective method” (p.191) for organizing social movements and generating new political values. As an illustration, because of the geographical reach of e-mail, activists used e-mail lists to organize global demonstrations. For instance, in 1999, the Peoples Global Action (PGA) got more than forty countries involved to protest against the anti-G8 Summit in Cologne. Another example, in Seattle 1999, around fifty thousand people took to the street to protest at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Many activists followed what happened through the internet and looked forward to creating the “next Seattle” (p.194).

In addition, social media has the power to change poll results. Youngsters (aged 18-24) are the group most linked by social media and the least likely to vote in mature democracies. Therefore, in order to attract youngsters to their side, democratic authorities use social media to encourage young people to vote (Chebib & Sohail, 2011; Suarez, 2011). In 2008, for example, when President Obama was preparing for the presidential election, his campaign used new technology and social media programs to reach voters, in particular, younger voters who are using up to date technology. A website was launched called [www.MyBarackObama.com](http://www.MyBarackObama.com); this website was designed to help Obama get elected, and to help his supporters, workers, and volunteers manage their offline and online activities. Furthermore, the Obama campaign used social networks such as LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to communicate with supporters and answer many questions. Ultimately, Obama succeeded in letting voters participate more and, by forming a bond with them, was able to capture the youth vote

(Rollyson, 2008). Moreover, this approach was successfully repeated in the 2012 presidential election campaign, when President Obama used social media in order to reach voters.

Using social media as a means of communication during the Haitian and Chilean earthquakes in 2010 are also noteworthy examples of the power of digital communication. Twitter and Facebook were used to distribute updated pictures of the catastrophes (Keller, 2010). These pictures helped gain more news coverage and donations around the world. Additionally, after the 8.8 quake in Chile, Herrero (2010) says that social media was at the “forefront” (para. 7) of spreading important information, such as finding families and friends, food and water, and how to get transportation.

Morozov (2011), a journalist and social commentator, talks about the democratizing power of the internet in his book *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. He says the internet, including social media networking sites, can weaken political authorities as much as it strengthens them. He affirms the internet and social media have been very positive; however, they can be used in hazardous ways. For example, authoritarian governments and dictators are using the internet to disseminate propaganda, track down their citizens, and monitor their Facebook and e-mail accounts.

However, Meikle (2002), an internet activist, explores in his book *Future Active* the openness of internet activism and the use of the internet. He states that the internet can be used as a “tool to effect social, political, and cultural change” (p. 4). Also, he says, “The internet has enabled unprecedented global commerce and helped create new oligopolies-but it has also mobilised millions of people locally and globally with very different visions of connected world communities.” To reinforce that, he offers an example of the anti-McDonald’s campaign. In 1996, many people gathered outside a McDonald’s store in London questioning the restaurant’s

use of recycling, treatment of animals, and treatment of workers. Using a laptop and a cell phone, this campaign grabbed media attention. In fact, the McSpotlight website generated a debate about McDonald's and more than 35,000 people visited the website in one day.

### **The Internet Activism in the Arab World**

This section moves the conversation from the use of social media for political reforms in the Western world to the Arab region. It gives a brief description of the rise of the internet and social media in the Arab world as well as discussion about new technology, censorship, and freedom of expression in daily life.

#### *The Internet and Social Media in the Arab World*

In the 1990s, the use of the internet rose in the Arab world; since then, social media has penetrated (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011) and become omnipresent in the Arab world. Internet World Stats (2012a) has estimated the number of internet users to be more than 90 million by the end of June 2012. A new study by *Booz & Company* in 2010 indicates that there has been a radical transformation from traditional media into new digital media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Namely, from June 2007 to June 2008, the number of social media users increased 66 percent in the MENA (Charline, Bhargava, Smayra, & Belcaid, 2010). In addition, more than 22 million Arabic people had Facebook accounts by September 30, 2012 (Internet World Stats, 2012a).

#### *Satellite TV, the Internet, and Censorship*

Before the 1990s in the Arab world, most media was owned, controlled, and regulated by governments (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). With the advent of satellite television, Al-Jazeera channel came to open the Arab's political horizons and "became a source of common knowledge, setting the agenda and galvanizing anger over offenses to Arab issues and ideals"



(Lynch, 2011, p. 302). Nevertheless, the satellite television's effect only lasted for a short period and proved to be limited (Lynch, 2011). Similarly, with the rapid growth of the internet and TV in the Arab world, many countries put some constraints on using the internet, such as prohibiting satellite dishes (Beliakov, 2011). Autocratic Arab governments have tried to control the news and information for a long time. During the protests in Iran in 2009, for example, the government slowed down the internet connections in order to prevent their citizens from coordinating demonstrations. In Tunisia, the government blocked certain websites; especially the websites that organize protests (Stepanova, 2011). What is more in October, 2010, during the Egyptian elections, the government blocked some opposing online newspapers, including the Muslim Brotherhood's online newspaper (Dunn, 2011).

However, this did not stop Arab people from overcoming these limitations, the new technology, the internet and social media, empowered people to access new infrastructure (Pintak, 2011). An article written after the Iranian elections reveals a case point:

The Internet, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook have reconstituted, especially among young people, how social relationships are constructed and how communication is produced, mediated, and received. They have also ushered in a new regime of visual imagery in which screen culture creates spectacular events just as much as they record them. Under such circumstances, state power becomes more porous and less controlled. (Giroux, 2009, para. 3)

Moreover, the internet allowed freedom of speech for countries who are suffering under a dictatorship. In Egypt, activists and young tech-savvy activists are using the new communication infrastructure to disseminate videos, pictures, articles, and news in order to show the truth to all people around the world. The internet enables people to overcome limitations and express their

intents reaching enough people, whereas the traditional media would not express those views or ideas (Bhuiyan, 2011). In brief, the internet and social media has shaped a way to overcome the censorship in many Arab countries (Giroux, 2009) and can be used (as a new means) for political reform and freedom of expression.

### *The Use of the Internet and Social Media for Political Changes*

The first notable movement in dissemination of news globally through social media was achieved in Iran (Keller, 2010). It is called *Green Revolution* or *Twitter Revolution*. On June 2009, after the Iranian presidential election, Iranian people questioned Ahmadinejad's victory with 62.63 percent of the vote over Mir-Hossein Mousavi with 33.75 percent ("Ahmadinejad hails election as protests grow," 2009). In response to that result, strikes took place at Tehran's Moseni Square in Iran and were escalated on June 13. Thousands of people went to the streets to protest against the election's outcome ("EDITORIAL: Iran's Twitter revolution," 2009; Grossman, 2009), democracy, and human rights (Esfandiari, 2010).

These demonstrations were conveyed to the world through social media. The Iranian government took down the telephone system and people could not send text messages, newspapers were censored, and websites were jammed. Since Iran is known to have a high tech-savvy society including hackers; they used "proxy portals" to open the blocked websites ("EDITORIAL: Iran's Twitter revolution," 2009, para. 4). Journalists used social media to show the whole world the truth. Social media, such Twitter and YouTube, was used to broadcast photos and videos of the protests and to show the abuses by the police ("EDITORIAL: Iran's Twitter revolution," 2009). In a search under "Iran" on Twitter, activists were sending over 100,000 tweets per day and over 8,000 tweets per hour ("Evolution of a Revolution," 2009).

These numbers provoked many questions about the power of social media and to what extent these tools can make political changes.

A memorable *symbol* of the continuous abuses by the Iranian police and the lack of democracy in Iran are embodied in Neda's killing. In June 20, 2009, Neda Soltani, a 16-year-old girl, was killed by a sniper on the streets of Tehran. This hideous incident was videotaped, posted on Facebook, and spread across the globe. "The Angel of Iran" is a Facebook page created to mourn her death. Many tweet updates were condemning Neda's death and asking for freedom. A demonstration was held and many protestors showed up holding Neda's picture as a *symbol* of demanding democracy and justice. A Few people were killed and hundreds were injured at the protest (Kennedy, 2009).

The Tunisian revolution in 2010 was one of the most fundamental pillars that instigated the Egyptian revolution of 2011. On December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a 27-year-old, set himself ablaze in the middle of a street, in protest against the police who took his vegetable cart. This incident sparked public outrage and photos and videos were taken and shared through social media. Bouazizi became a hero and his decision brought millions of protestors to the streets to strike against the corruption within the regime, the lack of social justice, and unemployment under their President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Mersal, 2011; Timpane, 2011). Accordingly, a Facebook page was created in Bouazizi's name in honor of him. Following his death, protestors were on the streets and a series of demonstrations were taking place against Ben Ali and his whole regime. Protestors used social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to spread news, organize demonstrations, and warn people about police movements (Timpane, 2011). Examples of Twitter hashtags were "#tunisia," "#benali," and "#sidibouزيد" (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). On

January 14, 2010, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali resigned and fled to Saudi Arabia after 23 years of power (Timpane, 2011).

### *Social Media, Skeptics and Optimists*

The use of cyberspace for freedom and democracy against autocratic regimes is introduced from different perspectives. Gladwell (2011) in his article in *The New Yorker*, says that the role of social media in revolutions has been exaggerated. In other words, the ideology of activism linked with social media, cannot produce affective social movements. He gave an example of Iran; people called it *The Twitter Revolution*, but there were only 19,235 registered Twitter accounts in Iran and most of them were from the West. He states that social media, such as Facebook and Twitter which social scientists call “weak ties,” is a tool in order to engage socially with friends, keep in touch with them, and gain new information. Likewise, Faris (2010), in his dissertation, analyzes the use of Facebook and blogs by Egyptian digital activists. He argues that although the use of social media can lead to richer information and facilitate grassroots organizing, the new technology cannot lead to determinative political change. Another critic is Esfandiari (2010) who says that the use of Twitter in helping the Iranian protestors in 2009 was a “hoax,” not as efficient as many activists have claimed. In fact, most of the tweets were from outside the Iranian ground, such as the United State, Turkey, and Switzerland. Most of the tweets were written in English; thus, he questions that if protestors were trying to organize strikes on the streets, why would they have written in a language (English) other than Farsi. While Esfandiari doubts the idea that social media helped facilitate protests, he admits it has some effects: despite the fact that Twitter helped to spread rumors about the Iranian incidents, it and YouTube also brought the world’s attention to the Iranian’s struggle with their government and sparked questions about their human rights.

On the other hand, in response to Gladwell (2011), Khoury (2011), a researcher and elections specialist at the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), says that the activism definition given by Gladwell is limited. “Activism, especially in the Arab World, has also been about changing people’s perspectives of their governments, fostering previously forbidden debate.” She asserts that “the revolution is being tweeted as we speak” (p. 82). Former U.S. national security adviser Mark Pfeifle says that “Twitter should get the Nobel Peace Prize because ‘without Twitter the people of Iran would not have felt empowered and confident to stand up for freedom and democracy.’” (as cited in Esfandiari, 2010). Similarly, Shirky (2011) refutes the claims that social media does not have a political power. He declares that social media, nowadays, empowers grassroots activists to topple authoritarian regimes. To foster this ideology, Shirky (2011) gave an example of what happened in the Philippines in 2001 to show that social media had facilitated the overthrow of a national leader. After some congressional authorities decided to ignore important evidence against the President Joseph Estrada during his trial, people were angry and nearly seven million text messages were sent in one week organizing a protest against him. On January 10, he was overthrown. Likewise, a report by The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University states that social media is ubiquitously accessible. Further, social media allows people to avert the authorities’ control and monopoly, as an alternative (Chorev, 2011).

The role of social media in political reforms has sparked a controversy among scholars. While opponents allege that social media platforms are not effective tools for social movements, many studies (as will be provided in the next sections) proved that social media platforms are influential tools in political regime changes. As this study addresses how diasporic Egyptians used social media sites during the revolution, the next section explores how diasporic

communities around the world are using cyberspace to shape their identities and get involved in political issues in their homelands.

#### Expatriates/Diaspora and Their Use of New Technology Around the World

Expatriate groups depend on communication media to remain connected to their native country and also to learn about their new home country (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000).

Because of the value of social media and audiovisual media, these forms of communication and information are seen consistently across diasporic communities around the world (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000). Crises are interpreted, values are discussed and explored, and new communities are constructed. Some even referred to the phenomenon of a deeper connection through social media, especially in times of crisis, as the “digital diaspora” (Crouch, 2011, para. 3).

Social media has helped to foster communication among people who are dispersed over great distances. Social media has enabled people living in diasporas to engage in political discourse in their own countries. Keller (2010) argues social media in the case of Iranians living in diaspora and international observers helped to bring about a feeling of solidarity. However, Keller (2010) also further argues that social media was not influential in helping Iranians who had experienced a diaspora. The primary reason that social media was less influential in the Iranian example is because social media was not actively engaged in organizing effective on-the-street resistance against the National Guard.

There are social relationships based on common origins and maintaining a collective sense of identity, political orientations that combine loyalties for the native country and the new home country, and economic strategies that are employed to work together collectively (Goswami, 2010, p. 20). India has experienced the increased migration that comes along with

globalization and has also led to stronger connections with other Indians living in diaspora. Indians have joined social media sites such as Facebook and Orkut, forming new communities, such as how Indians living in London address both aspects of their cultural experience: being away from home and finding a new home in London (Goswami, 2010).

Cyberspace, in all its forms, has connected diasporas to new media and public communication media (Bernal, 2006). New media and transnationalism are thereby connecting in ways that generate new forms of community, new spheres of public conversation, and new arenas for the generation and extension of culture (Bernal, 2006). Culture and identity are always in transition, especially inside the hearts and minds of individuals. In Eritrea, for example, identity, culture, government and even collective history were debated and redefined on the internet as demonstrators were mobilized, funds were raised for war, a new constitution was formalized, and pressure was placed on the government (Bernal, 2006).

Haitians living in diaspora have used the internet to interact across great distances, forming what can be seen as a global village (Parham, 2004). People who have migrated from Haiti demonstrate how “it has become increasingly common for migrants to sustain dispersed forms of community and identity” (Parham, 2004, p. 199). Haitians use the internet to connect their immigrant experience (and the alien feeling of that experience) with their native solidarity and connection to their new home (Parham, 2004). Haitian expatriates have also worked to help the country develop and grow financially using social media (Wah, 2000).

Greeks living in diaspora have embraced evolving and shifting social media forms in order to address how “Greece is going through a difficult era, where unity and people with a vision are desperately needed for things to change” (Syrigos, 2011, para. 5). There is a collective sense that action to help the Greeks should not just come from Greeks who are living within the

country's borders. Around seven million Greeks live as expatriates and social media can be seen as an influential tool for fighting against the powers that have pulled Greece down to the depths of misery (Syrigos, 2011).

It has been concluded that diasporas make use of many different types of audiovisual communication and that the content and flow of these communication channels are integral to globalization.

### **The Egyptian Revolution of 2011**

Egypt is long known for its ancient civilization. It is the largest Arab country and has played a central role in Middle Eastern politics in modern times ("Egypt Profile," 2012). Egypt has the largest population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with almost 84 million people in 2012 (Internet World Stats, 2012b). Because of its large population and ancient culture, Egypt has peaceful ties with America, which plays a crucial role in the Middle East ("America's lieutenant," 2010). Moreover, Egypt has its distinctive position between the Middle East and North Africa and has an enormous influence on the Arab world:

Whenever things go wrong in the Middle East, Western leaders flock to Egypt to show their concern. Egypt in turn obliges by convening summits and conferences, and leaning on its Arab neighbors to soften their tone. It was not by chance that Barack Obama chose Cairo as his platform for reaching out to the Muslim world with a speech that sought to repair America's battered image. ("America's lieutenant," 2010, p.3)

In 1981, President Hosni Mubarak was the successor for Anwar Al-Sadat after he was assassinated. He took a more moderate line and extended the *Emergency Law*. The Emergency Law gave the government the right to detain citizens any time, muzzle political oppositions, and deploy corruption around the country ("Egypt Profile," 2012).



### *Internet and Social Media in Egypt*

Egypt has the largest number of internet service providers in the Arab countries (Aladwani, 2003) and there are approximately 29.8 million internet users, comprising 35.6 percent of the population by the end of June 2012 (Internet World Stats, 2012c). The number of Facebook users in August 2010 was 4.5 million, 5.2 million in January-February 2011, 6.6 million in March, and 7.3 million in August (Chorev, 2011). In general, Facebook users in Egypt were estimated to be almost 12 million on September 31, 2012, with 14.1 percent penetration rate (Internet World Stats, 2012b).

Details of the 18-day Egyptian revolution of 2011 involve several factors, including the usage of Facebook and Twitter, such as the “The April 6 Youth Movement” and “We are all Khalid Said” Facebook group pages. Reasons for the revolution and the shutdown of the internet and cellphones in Egypt are discussed as well.

#### *The April 6 Youth Movement*

One of the most significant movements in Egypt was organized by the young factory worker Esraa Abdel Fatah in the Nile city of Mahalla al-Kubra, Cairo, Egypt. The general reason for the strike was to protest declining salaries and rising prices. Abdel Fatah and other leaders created a group on Facebook called the “The April 6 Youth Movement” to promote a national strike on that day. More than 70,000 Facebook members joined the group within less than two weeks and the movement’s concepts were spread all over the world. Consequently, on April 6, 2008, many workers around the country stayed at home and many shops were closed (Faris, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011).

The day after the strike, Abdel Fatah was arrested for organizing and planning the Facebook group. After her release, with a pressure from the authority’s regime, she apologized

for her role in the strike. “The April 6 Youth Movement” continued their movement supported by many young people. Many of them became important activists in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 (Faris, 2010).

A few months after “ The April 6 Youth Movement,” a group of young Tunisian activists followed the Egyptian model and created a page on Facebook called “The Progressive Youth of Tunisia” in order to form a strike in Tunisia. Facebook linked the two groups in Egypt and Tunisia as a channel of communication. Maher, an Egyptian leader from “ The April 6 Youth Movement” group, said “We shared our experience with strikes and blogging” (Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011).

This movement was not the first one that happened in Egypt during Mubarak’s regime. Since the Egyptian people were suffering for a long period from corruption, unemployment, and dictatorship, many political organizations started to organize demonstrations against the regime. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Kefaya movement, the political part hizb el Ghad, and others set up protests on streets (Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

*We are all Khalid Said (Kolena Khalid Said)*

On June 6, 2010, Khalid Said, a young Egyptian businessman was beaten to death by Egyptian security forces. Witnesses described what exactly happened. Said was taken out from an internet cafe; his head was smashed into marble stairs, and he was left on a street in Alexandria. Police officers were angry at Said because he copied a video about their corruption and involvement in a drug-related incident, and placed it on YouTube. Pictures of his disfigured corpse was disseminated by witnesses and spread out all over social networks, which provoked outrage among people (Crovitz, 2011; Mersal 2011).

Accordingly, engineer Wael Ghonim, a 30-year-old Google representative in the Middle East, created a Facebook group page called “We are all Khalid Said” (Crovitz, 2011; Suarez, 2011). Ghonim posted horrific photos, shot with a cellphone of Said’s face in the morgue, and YouTube videos comparing photos of a healthy Said with the morgue pictures. The page attracted approximately 500,000 members that time. This case augmented the Egyptians’ outrage. Ghonim and others used the Facebook group page to track corrupt officers and other police abuses. Thus, this grabbed more attention about the illegal arrests, torture in prisons, and corrupt government (Crovitz, 2011). After a few days, he was jailed for almost two weeks (Suarez, 2011). Upon his release, Ghonim posted on Twitter: “Freedom is a bless that deserves fighting for it” (as cited in Crovitz, 2011, para. 9). As of June 2011, the page has more than 1.3 million people supporter on the Arabic version and more than 100,000 on the English one (Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011).

### *Reasons for the 2011 Revolution*

Egyptian people wanted to get rid of the army power that has been in place since the 1952 revolution that aimed to dispose of the corrupted military. They wanted their power back from the army (Wambu, 2011). Further, corruption was the most prominent reason to strike against Mubarak and they no longer wanted to be ruled by him (Mersal, 2011; Wambu, 2011). Moreover, they wanted his authoritarian regime to be overthrown and replaced by a democratic system (Wambu, 2011).

More importantly, the economy in Egypt was worsening. David Goldman, an economist and writer for the *Asia Times Online*, said “Egypt has no oil, insignificant industry, small amounts of natural gas, and 40 million people who are about to become very, very hungry” (as cited in Wambu, 2011, p.17).

Workers were suffering from low wages. In fact, their wages were at \$7 per month and it had not changed in did not change for twenty years. In fact, forty percent of workers are living on \$2 per day with no benefits (Franklin, 2011). For the last six years, more than 2 million workers have participated in more than 3,300 protests and occupations. Unemployment among Egyptians is widespread in Egypt. The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics says that 11.9 percent of Egyptians in the first quarter of 2011 were unemployed compared to 8.9 percent in December 2010 (as cited in Feteha, 2011), and workers were suffering from low wages (Franklin, 2011). Even when working, because of the low wages, many employees tend to take bribes from people in order to facilitate people's work Therefore, corruption in Egypt is ubiquitous (Beliakov, 2011).

After the Tunisian revolution and the resignation of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the Egyptian people were inspired. On January 17, 2011, Ahmed Hashem Al-Sayed, a 25-year-old, set himself on fire in Alexandria, because he could not find a job. This incident was the third time an Egyptian did this since Bouaziz's martyrdom. The success of the Tunisian revolution gave Egyptians the hope to change their country for the better (Mersal, 2011).

### *The Shutdown of the Internet*

When Mubarak's regime felt threatened by protestors, they used a hostile method, namely shutting off the internet and mobile phone access (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). After midnight on the February 28<sup>th</sup>, about 93 percent of the internet connections in Egypt were blacked out for its 80 million citizens (Stepanova, 2011). The switch off of the internet kept Egypt cut off from the outside world and its internal system, as well (Dumenco, 2011; Glanz & Markoff, 2011). Elshabrawy asserted that without the internet "you don't have your tools – you don't have anything" (Glanz & Markoff, 2011, para. 41). The blackout of the internet continued

for five days and did not help President Husni Mubarak's reputation. In fact, it raised concerns between the worldwide technical communities that other autocratic governments could also possess the capability to shut down the internet (Glanz & Markoff, 2011).

### *Speak to Tweet Service*

After the internet was shut down by the Mubarak's government, Google and Twitter made tangible efforts in order to convey messages between the Egyptians (Suarez, 2011). As an illustration, "SayNow" (p.30), a service that allows celebrities and fans to connect and leave voicemail messages for each other, was acquired by Google. Google and Twitter teamed up and launched a special feature for the Egypt protestors to overcome the blackout of the internet and called it "Speak to tweet" (p. 30). This service allowed the Egyptians to call certain numbers and leave voicemail messages, which automatically were translated into type and sent out as tweets. Proudly, Google's official blog announced the service as a tool to help Egyptian people by saying "people in Egypt stay connected at this very difficult time" (p.30). Another option was that many people connected to the internet using Israeli and European satellite phones (Howard & Hussain, 2011). Alternatively, the Muslim Brotherhood depended on bloggers whose servers are in London (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Maziad, 2011). With the internet shutdown, young activists could not find each other and communicate on Facebook; thus, they took to the streets (Tahrir Square) to collaborate and protect each other. In brief, it can be said that not only the Egyptian government's strategy in shutting down the internet failed to halt political activism, but also it powered activists to take the streets (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

### *Cell Phones*

The use of cellphones is prevalent in Egypt. For every 100 people, 67 have mobile phones in Egypt (Howard et al., 2011). During the internet shutdown, the government also shut

down the activists' cell phones in order to prevent them from accessing social media programs, such as Facebook and Twitter. However, grassroots activists replaced their numbers multiple times by purchasing new SIM cards. Because the internet was blocked, they called their friends outside the country to post new tweets and news. The Ministry of the Interior and the Egyptian military forced the national mobile providers to send SMS (text message) to their customers, asking them to return home and stop protesting. On February 6, 2011, all cellphones connections were restored (Dunn, 2011).

### *The 18 days of the Egyptian Uprising*

The Egypt revolution is called *Facebook Revolution* (Cottle, 2011) because grassroots activists started to plan and organize protests through Facebook and Twitter (Berger, 2011). Examples of Twitter hashtags were “#jan25,” “#Egypt,” “#Mubarak,” and “#Tahrir” (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). On Facebook, more than 80,000 people clicked on *attend* for the January 25 demonstration. On January 25, 2011, Egypt National Day, thousands of people were protesting on streets at Tahrir Square in Cairo demanding for social change. They chose this date to protest against police abuses under Mubarak's government, which was known *Day of Anger* (Berger, 2011). Those people were educated but unemployed and went to the streets together no matter what their religions were. Before the internet was blacked out, Egyptians “found solidarity through digital media, and then used their mobile phones to call their social networks into the streets” (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.38). On Friday January 28, 2011, *Friday of Rage*, many protesters streamed from mosques around Cairo and went to Tahrir Square to join thousands of protesters asking Mubarak and his regime to step down (“Egyptians protest army,” 2011). On Tuesday February 1, 2011, protestors reached the peak and planned the *March of the Millions* to demand the resignation of Mubarak (Cottle, 2011). After 18 days of resistance, on

February 11, known as *Farewell Friday*, President Husni Mubarak finally stepped down after 30 years of dictatorship (Berger, 2011) and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) led Egypt.

### **Using Social Media in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising**

Many Egyptians and other people outside Egypt were curious and wanted to know up to date information about what was happening. Unfortunately, mass media in Egypt was controlled by the regime who restrained freedom of speech. Local media, such as national newspapers, were not reporting the real events because they were constrained. Social media, on the other hand, empowered citizens, journalists, and activists to overcome the control of local media and broadcast what was actually happening by taking photos, uploading videos, and writing their personal experience. Social media allowed true and new information to be spread inside and outside the Arab world (Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011). Social media was a vital tool compared to the gagged local media. In Egypt, strikers used social media to tell stories about police abuses, atrocities, and violence (Khondker, 2011). Additionally, social media sites helped Egyptian revolutionaries to regulate protests and endure their appearance in Tahrir Square. It also provided them with information regarding how to perform and where to go during the events. Hence, social media and face-to-face communication can complete each other as integrated means (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Each social movement needs a communication tool. In other words, “Every mass movement needs spaces where political alternatives can be debated and organization can take place” (Alexander, 2011, para.14). A long time ago, Egypt encountered political movements similar to this one. Activists used bookshops, newspapers, and secret meetings, which played an important role in the movement. As Ahmed, a socialist activist in Tahrir Square said, “Online

organizing is very important because activists have been able to discuss and take decisions without having to organize a meeting which could be broken up by the police” (as cited in Alexander, 2011, para.18). Although 10 to 20 percent of people in the MENA region, especially Egypt, can access the internet, most of them are the grassroots activists who molded the successful revolutions:

Yet this minority is a strategic one, typically comprising an elite made up of educated professionals, young entrepreneurs, urban dwellers, and government workers. These are the people who formed the networks that initiated, coordinated, and sustained successful campaigns of civil disobedience against authoritarian rule. (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.47)

Ghonim said, “Everything was done by the power of the people for the people, and that’s the power of the internet” (As cited in Quarterly, 2011, p. 64). The big achievement of the Egyptian revolution should be attributed to the Egyptian people; however, the impact of social media is undeniable. Certainly, social media played a vital role in the mobilization and organization of the Egyptian revolt. Activists were able to use social media mobile technologies to access various networks, reach beyond physical and social borders, and utilize more resources to bring the social change (Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011). A joke appeared before January 25<sup>th</sup>; After Mubarak’s death, his predecessors Jamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Al-Sadat asked him, “Poison or gunfire” He replied, “Facebook” (Mersal, 2011).

On the contrary, in his article *The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted in The Washington Quarterly*, Alterman (2011) argues that social media has not been helpful in toppling authoritarian regimes. In fact, he insists that social media has played a *limited* role in Arab revolutions for many reasons. Firstly, these political changes cannot be considered as revolutions



because the revolution is not by what they removed (i.e. Mubarak), but what they replace it with. In addition, traditional media, such as TV, has played superior role than social media in instigating protesters and expanding them into millions.

Howard & Hussain (2011) identified six phases of the story of social media and the Arab Spring, especially in Egypt and Tunisia. The first phase was a *preparation* phase. In fact, protesters used social media to reach each other and unify their political objectives. The second phase was an *ignition* phase. Local media was muzzled, but digital media ignited the public to take streets. Then, a period of *street protests* was organized through online networking. Then the *international buy-in* phase came when digital media accelerated the dissemination of the news to foreign governments, global organization, and international news agencies. Matters then built toward a *climax* as regimes, “maneuvering via some mixture of concession and repression,” (p.42) which fail to stop the protesters and crumble their demands. In some cases, such as Tunisia and Egypt, there was an additional phase of *follow-on information warfare* as different parties competed with each other “by gaining control over the revolutionary narrative” (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.42). Likewise, Khamis & Vaughn (2011) state that the significance of new media before, during, and after the Egyptian revolution can be shown in three ways: enabling cyberactivism, which triggered the people to take the streets; secondly, promoting citizens to coordinate, mobilize, and engage in demonstrations; finally, encouraging ordinary citizens to tell the real version of the story as a new form of citizen journalism. Therefore, new media was used as a tool for demonstrators before, during, and after the revolution (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

Twitter is a substantial method for the information flow among people in the Arab world, in particular Egypt. The *Arab Social Media Report* published a report showing that social media is growing significantly in the Arab region by providing statistics about the usage of data for

social media in the Arab world between January 5 and October 1, 2011. As an illustration, the number of Facebook users in Egypt was 4,157,500 million more than in UK. Among Facebook users living in Egypt, 75 percent of them were youths (aged 15 – 29). For Twitter, Egypt had 6,000,000 tweets between September 1 and 30, 2011. Ultimately, the hashtag “Egypt” was the second most used hashtag in Twitter in the Arab region after the hashtag “Bahrain.” According to Trender, the term “Egypt” and the hashtag “Egypt” occurred on average of 15,000 tweets per hour. Further, from January 26 to February 2, Egypt was mentioned an average of 250,000 posts per day. On Friday of rage, January 28, 574,765 tweets mentioned the word Egypt (Dumenco, 2011). An analysis study led by Lotan et al. (2011) was about the flow of information during the Egyptian and Tunisian uprising. For Egypt, about 230, 270 tweet messages were collected from January 24-29, 2011 that contained the words “#Egypt” or “#jan25” with 62,612 Twitter users. Then, they identified the most often occurring tweets from the datasets and selected the top 10 percent. For formation flows, they found that news on twitter was spread by bloggers, activists, and journalists. Finally, scholars discussed how Twitter was a significant tool in diffusing timely information around the world (Dubai School of Government, 2011a).

A new study at the University of Washington led by Howard (2011) was conducted to analyze more than 3 million tweets on Twitter, videos from YouTube, and thousands of blogs about political conversations in Tunisia and Egypt. Results confirmed that social media played a crucial role in the political uprising in Tunisia and Egypt. More importantly, the conclusion was based on three key factors. First, “Social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring” (p.2). In Egypt, bloggers used new technology to deploy critical information about the regime. Second, “A spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground” (p.3). When the internet was shut down in Egypt, strikers found numerous

ways to stay connected. For example, Muslim Brotherhood depend on bloggers whose servers were in London. Third, “Social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders” (p. 3). In Egypt, a week before the resignation of Mubarak, the total rate of tweets in Egypt and around the world about political change escalated from 2,300 per day to 230,000 per day. On February 11, Mubarak’s resignation day, more than 225,000 tweets were spread around the world from outside the country talking about that news (Howard et al., 2011).

Another study was conducted to examine the use of social media in Egypt during the political protest and emphasized the significance role of youths. Kavanaugh et al. (2012) comprised data analysis of Twitter from Tunisia and Egypt, and a survey of young people in Egypt. For the Twitter collection, scholars focused on 514,782 tweets posted between February 7-14, 2011, just before and after Mubarak’s resignation. For Egypt, example of hashtags were “#Jan25,” “#Egypt,” “#Mubarak,” “#Tahrir,” “#Cairo,” “#Tunisia,” and “#Yemen.” From their findings, the highest frequency of tweets identified their location in Egypt. For the survey method, 241 undergraduate students at Alexandria University participated in this survey about numerous information sources that respondents might have used during the uprising. Statistics show many significant results. For the source of information and communication during the uprising, 80.2 percent say they use of their home phone or cell phone, voice or text messages, to know about information from their family and friends. During the uprising, from January to March 2011, about 94.5 percent say they used the internet for browsing stuff about the uprising. For social media, 31.8 percent said they used Twitter during the Egyptian uprising. Finally, scholars concluded that young people in Egypt have the access to social media, discuss information with friends, and compare it with other sources from the internet (Kavanaugh et al., 2012).

That volume of public discussion, helped reshape the understanding of the awakening of free expression in many Arab countries. Following the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, a recent research report, *Social Media in the Arab World*, by Ghannam (2011) discusses the awakening of free expression in the many Arab countries. He declares that social media has changed the freedom of expression for many Arab countries, including Egypt, and helped to break down the monopoly of information in these countries. He says:

The Arab world has witnessed the rise of an independent vibrant social media and steadily increasing citizen engagement on the Internet that is expected to attract 100 million Arab users by 2015 (...) To peruse the Arab social media sites, blogs, online videos, and other digital platforms is to witness what is arguably the most dramatic and unprecedented improvement in freedom of expression, association, and access to information in contemporary Arab history. (p. 4)

A study was established to discuss the role of social media and its impact on the Egyptian revolution in 2011 by analyzing how social media eased the Egyptian revolution. Researchers answer this question by listing the positive features that made social media an attractive method for the Egyptians. To illustrate, social media is accessible, has low barriers to entry, and is easy to use. Social media has a low communication barrier because it does not require the intimacy of in person communication, which can be suitable for many people. Many people are using their cell phones to access social media. For example, during protests, many people took pictures and videos and uploaded them to YouTube. Moreover, social media is considered a credible source of news and information. This can be seen when Ghonim used Facebook to organize a public protest, people trusted him. He gave them information about evading the police and how to overcome any problem. More importantly, many journalists used news from social media to

update their information. Social media offers multidimensional features, such as pages, groups, and events in Facebook. Social media can overcome the social differences and physical distance. As such, the Egyptian revolution was comprised from different classes, for instance, workers, students, democracy campaigners, judges, and even people from different religions. Eventually, the flow of information could not be controlled in social media. During the uprising, Twitter and Google helped protestors to disseminate images and information about the crisis (Chebib & Sohail, 2011).

In addition to social media itself, Nanabhay, head of Al-jazeera online English, and Farmanfarmaian (2011) conducted a research to examine the role of public spaces in constructing the public sphere. The research focused on 650 videos posted between January 25 and February 11, 2011 to YouTube and other websites. The results show that protestors used the internet to show their physical protests. Around 76 percent of these videos were uploaded and 87 percent was viewed by citizens on January 25. Thus, the most popular videos that were watched over the 18 days were citizen produced. Protestors took YouTube videos and spread them through social networking sites, which played a significant role in instigating the social movement through social media. Therefore, “While mainstream media did not have Egypt at the top of its news agenda that day,” (p. 595) social media, such as YouTube videos, empowered people to reach the public without relying on traditional media. Moreover, Park, Ahn, Myung, Lim, Lee, & Cha (2011) analyzed more than 3 million web documents around the world, including weblogs, mainstream news, and Facebook pages, in order to know the extent of the reactions and emotions in the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings of 2011 on the internet. The study found that “individual bloggers and Facebook users were more prone to be positive about the regime change” (p. 1).

Finally, Lynch (2011) states that much “political science literature focused on the durability of the authoritarian Middle Eastern state” (p. 301). The new political changes, such as in Egypt and Tunisia, however, contradicted what literature said about Arab states. The literature did not anticipate that there would be a new shift in technology, for example, social media. In fact, social media was a *powerful channels* for grassroots activists to enable their voices to be heard globally. Further, activists used social media to convey their messages, organize protests, and overcome state censorship. Lynch (2011) endorses that the use of the new media is a new aspect that literature did not cover and literature needs to reassess the usage of social media in social activism for political change. Activists were able to push the regime for political changes and challenge them as well. Lynch states, “The massive wave of protest and the spotlight cast by the new media environment has at least in some cases (such as Tunisia and Egypt) partially restrained their ability to use their full arsenals of repressive force” (p. 304). Yet, the author asks whether social media continues to challenge the regimes’ abilities and how any regime can overcome the limitations in the future. He emphasizes that with new media, scholars need to step back and reexamine their conceptual ideas about the capability of social activists to change the Arab authoritarian states.

The 2012 presidential elections were part of the Egyptian revolution and social media was used during the elections.

### **The Presidential Elections of 2012**

After the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took the power in Egypt, the first round of the freely Egyptian presidential election was held during May 2012 (Lutz, 2012). More importantly, Egyptians in the diaspora had the opportunity to participate in the Egyptians elections of 2012 (Kuşcu, 2012) after being unable to vote. In the first round of polls, Mohamad

Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, obtained 26 percent from all votes, while Ahmed Shafiq, the Prime Minister during Mubarak's state, obtained 23 percent in the second place ("Egypt's 2012 Presidential Elections," 2012). The third place was for Hamdeen Sabahi, the leftist candidate, who received 20.72 percent, followed by Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, an Islamic liberal, who garnered 17.47 percent, and last Amr Mousa who received 11.13 of the votes (Stern, 2012). Since neither of the top two candidates received close to 50 percent of the votes, a second round of Egyptian elections was held ("Egypt's 2012 Presidential Elections," 2012). This result evoked the Egyptian's outrage because many of them did not want the old regime (Shafiq) or religious rule (Morsi) to be the president ("Violence flares after Egypt election," 2012). As a result, many of the Egyptian people refused to vote. On June 24, 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi was announced as Egypt's president by winning the elections against Ahmed Shafiq with 51.7 percent of all voters (Weaver, 2012).

The role of social media in the Egyptian uprising did not halt after Mubarak's fall. It extended its roots playing an essential role in the 2012 Egyptian presidential elections (Lutz, 2012). An analysis study conducted by Lutz (2012) shows that some political groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, effectively employed social media during the Egyptian elections, which facilitated their mission and gained support from electors. Another semantic analysis by Amel (2012) examines Twitter tweets that mentioned the 2012 presidential elections from April 10, 2012 to May 24, 2012. The analysis shows that social media networking sites can be used in order to take a glance at the electors' perspectives in the political polls (Amel, 2012). These studies confirm that social media sites can exemplify public opinion views, including diasporic communities.

## **Egyptian Diasporas and Social Media**

Currently, there are an estimated eight million Egyptian expatriates around the globe (“Egypt Postpones Announcement,” 2012), approximately 10 percent of the total Egyptian population. Mobility and migration are both increased because of the heightened powers of capitalism and globalization (Sassen, 1991). A frequent occurrence is that people in rural areas of Egypt move to Egyptian urban centers trying to find better jobs. Once people are uprooted and become mobile by leaving their original homes and communities, they then become much more willing to move to a different country trying to find better jobs because they are already uprooted (Sassen, 1991). Egyptians leave hoping for better economic opportunities, and this often involves situations in which people are trying to build better lives for their current or future children.

Understanding the use of social media by expatriates primarily centers around identity. Much of the technology and internet infrastructure, such as computers and internet access that is found in the world, has educational roots. Saudi Arabia’s adoption of internet culture and technology, for example, made a leap forward ten years ago when “the UNDP-sponsored TACCs (Technology Access Community Centers) aimed to provide community access to the internet and other educational resources including distance education” (Creed & Perraton, 2001, pp. 25-26). Once the technology became available, Egyptian expatriates who strongly identified themselves as Egyptian were then able to use emerging communication technology in order to be more closely connected to the everyday issues of their home country.

### *Egyptian Diasporas and Social Media during the Egyptian Revolution of 2011*

In 2011, Egyptian expatriates who were living around the world organized protests in support of the Egyptian revolution, including in Los Angeles, New York City, and other major world cities. Many Egyptians returned to Egypt, with “stories of educated, experienced, and



successful members of their communities who have decided to leave behind comfortable lives abroad to contribute to the development of post-Mubarak Egypt” (Reeve, 2011, para. 4).

Egyptian expatriates took on crucial roles during the revolution, garnering international support for the national desire toward democracy and the end of Mubarak’s dictatorship.

While the Tahrir Square protests were ongoing, Egyptian Americans used a variety of methods to show their support for the protestors. They organized rallies in different parts of the US to protest the Mubarak regime and the régime’s violent clashes with protestors as well as raising awareness about the protestors’ rightful need for a regime change.

(Kuşcu, 2012, p. 130)

Through various communication channels, including social networks, expatriates worked toward facilitating international networks of support. Twitter and other websites and applications, for example, were used to spread ideas, organize actions, attract international media attention, link information, provide visual information, and help overcome censorship (Bennett, 2011).

Skype, Facebook, email, Twitter etc. allows diaspora in other countries to communicate easily with those protesting in the homeland. This also helps create more media coverage particularly in situations where the diaspora can mediate the message of the revolution to news organisations in English rather than the local language. It also provides an international support network for protesters. (para. 13)

The momentum of expatriates has continued after the revolution as well, with Egyptians “living abroad organizing protests in many world capitals on the first anniversary of the January 25 Revolution, showing solidarity with protests against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in Tahrir Square and other Egyptian governorates” (“Expatriate Egyptians,” 2012, para.1).

Many expatriates worked with social media technologies that were hosted in Western nations. Cyberactivists living outside of Egypt had better access to social media, and those tools were also engaged with Western internet culture. This meant that expatriate Egyptians collaborated with many people who had never been to Egypt and did not speak Egyptian Arabic, which further shows how the expatriates were the guiding forces of the communication, even when people from other countries became involved with the revolution and social media. Expatriates, for example, were often called by phone when the internet was blocked, so that people outside of Egypt could send messages through Twitter and other forms of social media despite having restricted access (Dunn, 2011).

Social media has played a remarkable role not only in how Egyptians used it to organize the anti-government protests, but in how the Egyptian diasporas have witnessed, relayed information and influenced the world order. Although mainstream media are belittling the power of social media by claiming that the access to internet has been blocked, users in Egypt can always find ways to bypass Twitter and Facebook blocks through mobile and third-party apps, proxy sites, software, VPN... On the other hand, the Internet block raised no less anxiety of the Egyptian Diasporas than people in homeland. (Zhang, 2011, para. 5)

When one takes into account how Western media has the ability to drown out less dominant narratives, it is clear that having Egypt's story maintained and shaped by Egyptians themselves was able to help shape their own truths. An early impact of social networking and reclaiming narratives was seen in how CNN originally reported the story with the headline of *Chaos in Egypt* but then changed the headline to *Uprising in Egypt* after talking to an Egyptian

expatriate blogger, Mona Eltahawy, who lived in the United States (Zhang, 2011). Voices of protest came from Egyptian and Arab voices around the world.

People around the world, though Egyptians and Egyptian expatriates most of all, “followed the revolt and communicated with insurgents inside to collect stories” (Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011, p. 9), and used social media in order to show their national affiliation (Severo & Zuolo, 2011). Analysis of three million tweets that used the six most prominent hashtags related to the revolts in Arab countries, such as “#egypt” or Tunisia’s “#sidibouزيد,” was able to conclude that the major increases in the tags came from outside of the Middle East, though some of those were also expatriates. Social media in both Tunisia and Egypt was used by advocates for democracy to communicate with people abroad (Howard et al, 2011). As more and more attention was paid to the subject, more and more Egyptians and Egyptian expatriates tried to carry the message as part of what gradually became an organized strategy (Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011). It has been seen that people who felt directly connected, whether within a country or expatriates, were especially interested in understanding the danger to their families or overall safety, especially through first-hand accounts of the crisis (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). “Additionally, in Middle Eastern societies close friends, family and extended family members tend to communicate with each other on a fairly regular basis whether face-to-face, by telephone, or online” (Kavanaugh et al., 2012, p. 8).

Cunningham and Sinclair (2000) investigated diasporas and the use of communication media, examining how diasporas blend culture and identity into hybrid forms, such as how television can blur the boundaries between an expatriate’s native country and their new home country. The next step in this melding of technology and grassroots activism has been how social networking has become a form of media instead of merely a tool for social communication

(Zhang, 2011). It could be said that there has been little research that has directly examined the role of Egyptians living in diaspora who used social media for the revolution. On the individual scale, Egyptian expatriates, such as those living in Saudi Arabia, are not fully understood. For that reason, from this review of literature, what has been left out is a study to demonstrate the relation between social media, diasporic Egyptians, and political reforms. The following research questions were investigated in this study to analyze how expatriate Egyptians used social media during the 2011 Egyptian uprising.

1. What was their source of political information during the revolution of 2011?
2. What types of communication media styles were used with relatives and friends in Egypt during the revolution of 2011?
3. During the uprising, was there any significant role performed to help relatives or friends in Egypt using social media?

### Chapter Three: Methodology

This study focused on analyzing the role of Egyptian diasporas in Saudi Arabia and their use of social media during the Egyptian revolution of 2011. The study explored how expatriate Egyptians used social media during the uprising by answering these questions:

1. What was their source of political information during the revolution of 2011?
2. What types of communication media styles were used with relatives and friends in Egypt during the revolution of 2011?
3. During the uprising, was there any significant role performed to help relatives or friends in Egypt using social media?

The aim of this study is to help elaborate and enrich contemporary understandings of the role of social media during times of political change, especially in the Middle East.

#### Choice of Methods

##### *Semi-structured Interview*

Structured interviews were conducted with Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia. The semi-structured interview is effective when used in exploratory and descriptive research in order to probe not only what individuals say, but also what they believe to be true about a subject. In a semi-structured interview, new questions can be asked in order to gather more specific details and answers (Frey, Botan, & Kreps 2000). Thus, the semi-structured interview approach (face-to-face interviews) was preferred over structured or unstructured interviews to allow for follow-up questions which might occur during the interview and that were not outlined in the original interview questions.

As this research focused on investigating, describing, and analyzing the use of social media by Egyptian diasporas, a grounded theory seemed to be an ideal methodological approach to analyze the research.

## Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was first explicated in 1967 (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). It is a qualitative methodology that is used by scholars to “analyze communication processes and content” (Scott, 2009, p. 442). In contrast to most research methodologies, data analysis is essential at the initial stage of the data collection process because it guides and facilitates later interviews and observations. This is called the *iterative process* (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Traditional theories necessitate devising a single hypothesis; however, grounded theory enables researchers to move back and forth between data analysis and observation and to provide elucidations about the correlation between repeated phenomena and conceptions (Scott, 2009). Moreover, grounded theory offers a way for research questions to be changed and refined, and extra questions can be added during the study. Accordingly, I asked respondents extra questions that were not outlined in the original interview questions, which occurred within the interview context.

Grounded theory is the best method to tackle this study because it is suitable for qualitative interviews that “address individual experience” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 314) and involves “social interaction that is highly symbolic in itself” (Goulding, 2005, p. 295), which this study does. Further, grounded theory allows behavior to be diagnosed in each interview, including verbal and non-verbal forms of communication (Schwandt, 1994).

Interview questions must reflect the researcher’s subject and participants’ practices (Charmaz, 2003). Thus, in this study, I asked participants about their experience with social media during the Egyptian revolution of 2011, as well as their preferences in social media websites and participation in these platforms. Then, my objective was to document the tacit outcomes of their experiences and analyze them “as a constructive of reality” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 314). “Constructivists also view data analysis as a construction that not only locates the data in

time, place, culture, and context, but also reflects the researcher's thinking" (p. 313). Therefore, grounded theory gives the researcher the opportunity to shape and construct meanings and actions as well as correlate a relationship between the researcher and participants that facilitates analyzing data. This process is called the *coding* technique (Goulding, 2005). Coding is an essential step in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003) because interview transcripts are read carefully in order to find commonalities among passages and generating themes (Goulding, 2005). The interview scripts for this project had common answers, which facilitated the coding procedure.

### **Ethnography Lens**

For the purpose of this study, identity is concerned with ethnicity, culture, and nationality. This work concentrated specifically on expatriate Egyptians who are living away from Egypt. New technology, including social media, has made the world a smaller place, and this new degree of interconnectivity became quite evident when Egyptians who live in Saudi Arabia engaged with the Egyptian revolution. Because this study sheds light on the perceptions of a particular community, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia, and their practices during the uprising through social media, it is worth mentioning the ethnographic approach. "Ethnography is a way of seeing through the participants' eyes: a grounded approach that aims for a deep understanding of the cultural foundations of the group" (Hine, 2000, p. 21). Because I have a prior knowledge about the diasporic Egyptians community as well as being accustomed to interacting with them in Saudi Arabia, this work took on an ethnographic lens. Ethnography has been used by communication scholars to evaluate communication behaviors, understand humans' social lives, and answer questions of *why* and *how* they communicate (Rubin, Rubin, & Piele, 2005).

Likewise, Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000) explain that in ethnographic research, scholars evaluate how people from different cultures collaborate by appraising their overt and covert behaviors:

Most ethnographers study how specific groups in their *own* society interact. Through immersion in the context, they examine the patterned interactions and significant symbols of specific groups to identify the cultural norms (rules) that direct their behaviors and the meanings that people ascribe to their own and each other's behaviors (...) Ethnographers want to understand the explicit and implicit tacit assumptions that exist in particular cultural groups that simultaneously enable and constrain interaction among members. (p. 259)

For this study, I observed participants' behaviors, symbols, and reactions during the interview process, and used my personal experience to help analyze their answers.

Communicating with people from different cultures requires the researcher to be attentive and prudent in understanding cultural differences. Egypt has its own culture and civilization. Considering the fact that there are many Egyptians living and working in Saudi Arabia and that many Saudis are visiting Egypt for tourism year round, I can say that we share a similar traditional background. In addition, most Egyptians and Saudis are accustomed with each other's culture. More importantly, we share the same language, which is Arabic, and I can understand their slang language. Lindolf (1995) explains that sharing a similar cultural background in conducting interviews is significant for every researcher because "such pairings smooth the way initially, promote empathy, and lead to better field relations and quality of data" (p. 140). This feature enabled me to understand subjects' cultural examples, metaphors, and analogies throughout the interviews.



As a Saudi female researcher who is familiar with Egyptian culture, I took into consideration the possibility that respondents might reject my request to talk about an historic political event. Talking about politics can be considered a taboo in our culture. Not all people like to talk about politics, especially in front of foreigners. Charmaz (2003) explains that the interviewer must make sure that respondents are comfortable in telling their experience. Yet, Egyptian people have been suffering for a long time from censorship and freedom of speech. Only after Mubarak's resignation, I realized that Egyptians are more open to talk and express their experiences, precisely about politics, and even share their ideas with people on social media. Moreover, during the interviews, respondents could answer questions and narrate stories that they had not told to any one before. Because of the sensitivity of this topic, I thought that respondents would be hesitant; however, after the interview began, they expressed their hidden intents and gave stories about their experiences with social media.

### **Interview Question Design**

Research questions were used as a basis to generate the interview questions (see Appendix A and B). I started with general questions and then followed up with specific questions.

The first research question for this study asks “what was the source of political information for Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia during the revolution of 2011?” The main objective of this question is to know, in general, what sources Egyptians in Saudi Arabia used to glean their political information during the uprising, such as TV channels, the internet (news websites or any other websites), family and friends, and/or social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.). The following interview questions were generated based on research question one:

- During the Egyptian uprising, what was your source for political information?
- What was your source of political information during the absence of the internet in Egypt? Could you explain please?

In this project, social media platforms are the focus, however, I needed to know what other sources were used in order to find out the extent to which Egyptians in Saudi Arabia relied on social media websites. Moreover, I needed to know whether there were any changes in their source of political information during the absence of the internet.

In addition, I wanted to know to what degree Egyptians in Saudi Arabia used the internet and social media during the revolution by asking them about the amount of time they used these technologies and from where they logged on. Also, there are questions about their preferences for internet websites, such as news websites, because there are many websites that have pages on Facebook:

- How many hours per day did you use the internet during the uprising?
- From where did you log onto the internet?
- What were the most popular visited websites?
- How many hours did you use social media during the revolution?
- What were the most popular social media sites that you used during the uprising?
- What language did you use?

The Egyptian presidential election was held at the time of the interview procedures. Since the revolution did not end upon Mubarak's resignation, I wanted to conclude the interview with an event that was occurring concurrently and focused on a positive context. I chose to highlight a clean and healthy political election, an event that many Egyptians had dreamed of for a long time. Charmaz (2003) suggests that "concluding questions should be slanted toward positive responses, to bring the interview to closure on a positive note" (p. 315). Thus, the last question asked participants about their preferred candidate and how they supported their candidate through using social media platforms in order to improve their country. The question is:

- During the presidential elections, can you explain your participation through social media platforms in the first and second phases.
- The second research question for this project asks about the types of communication

media styles used with relatives and friends in Egypt during the revolution of 2011. In this

question, I wanted to know whether Egyptians in Saudi Arabia used social media as a mode of communication during the uprising or whether other types of communication were used by asking these questions:

- What types of communication media style were used with relatives and friends in Egypt during the revolution?
- During the internet shutdown in Egypt, how did you communicate with friends and relatives in Egypt?

The last research question asks about whether there was any significant role performed by Egyptians in Saudi Arabia to help relatives or friends in Egypt using social media. This question was needed in order to provide more examples about how Egyptians in Saudi Arabia used social media during the uprising. Further, it gave respondents the chance to express their feelings and make elaborations and clarifications about their experiences using these platforms in order to participate and help Egyptian revolutionaries in Egypt:

- Can you talk about your participation during the uprising using social media? Can you give examples?
- Can you talk about your participation during the internet shutdown using social media?

### **Sample of Participants (Data Gathering)**

#### *Selection of Sample Procedure*

In order to conduct all the interviews personally, I traveled to Saudi Arabia, my country of origin, in summer 2011. Since the Egyptian revolution was organized by youth cyberactivists, my initial sample targeted Egyptians between 18 to 29 years of age who lived during the uprising and were still living in Saudi Arabia, and who had been using social media during the uprising. I struggled to find individuals in this age range who met the requirements because many young Egyptians went on vacation in Egypt during the interview process (in summer) or were students in Egypt and their parents were working in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I opened the range to include any Egyptians over 18 who met the requirements. After making interviews, I realized

that not only youth in the diaspora used social media during the revolutions, but also older people used and were still using social media sites. Those people suffered from corruption, injustice, and poverty in Egypt. They came to Saudi Arabia a long time ago seeking jobs and leaving their families because they could not find employment opportunities back in Egypt. Thus, they talked from their heart, expressing that many of them were waiting for this step (the revolution) for a long time and were proud of the Egyptian youth.

### *Recruiting Participants*

I used network sampling (snowball sampling) to find respondents. Using snowball sampling made my mission easier than using any other type of sampling in order to reach participants. I started by interviewing two women I was introduced to by a family member. After interviewing them, I was referred to other Egyptians and given their cell phone numbers. I initially called each person; some of them were interested in my study and they chose an appropriate time to be interviewed, while others did not want to participate (did not answer my phone calls or ignored my request to participate). Interviewees kept referring me to others until I finished all my interviews. More importantly, snowball sampling facilitates breaking the ice between respondents and the interviewer. That was manifested when I called participants for the first time: each person knew who I was and the purpose of my call. Thus, I felt that participants were more comfortable to meet with me, trust me, and talk on a critical topic without knowing me in person.

### *Sample Size*

For this project, the targeted sample was 20 participants. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggest that a sample between 6 and 12 interviews will be adequate if the selected group is homogenous in order to understand and achieve the objective of the research. Conducting 12

interviews can also provide in-depth answers. For more profound analysis between answers, I augmented my sample goal to 20. The actual number of sample magnitude was 17 respondents, which was enough to have sample diversity. After 17 interviews, I felt that this number was adequate because I started to observe common themes emerging which would allow me to draw relationships between phenomena and conceptions.

For respondents, ages ranged from 25 to 59 years-old. The average age was 40.73 years old. Of the 17 respondents, there were 14 male and 3 female. Demographic information, such as jobs, living conditions, or their origin city in Egypt, was not collected for privacy purposes and the study will not benefit from it. The only demographic data collected was age and gender.

### **Interview Process**

Prior to each interview, a consent sheet in Arabic was provided to all respondents. The consent sheet (Appendix C and D) informed respondents that the interview is part of academic research for an MA degree and that all information would be confidential and solely for research purposes. The consent sheet included a brief about the study itself, the benefits of the study, and indicated that the study would not disseminate any personal information about the participants, including their names and identities. I explained to respondents that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the interview at any point. Respondents were asked to sign a consent form for their participation.

I assigned each respondent a randomly generated number in order to identify each interviewee in the research report. Each interview lasted between twenty and forty minutes. I explained to respondents that they could take breaks during the interview and withdraw from the interview whenever they wanted and without prejudice. No one took breaks or stopped the

interview for any reason. For better communication and answers, the entire dialogue was in Arabic language.

Respondents answered all questions and I asked for clarifications when it was possible. Each interview was recorded using an audio recorder. I took notes during the interviews for interesting answers in order to help me throughout the analysis process. After finishing the interview process, all interviews were transcribed in Arabic language. Then, scripts were translated into English for the purpose of completing the research report, which is in English.

### **Limitations**

There were minimal risks to the respondents in this research. It is believed that the major risk is privacy assurance. To minimize this positional risk, as previously explained, random generated numbers were used when reporting the findings. Identities were not presented before, during, or after the study was completed. One potential limitation is the sample size. The sample size of the research might not reflect the entire sample of the target population of Egyptians in Saudi Arabia.

### **Data Analysis**

Grounded theory offers an opportunity to the researcher to develop a “conceptual analysis” of the interview texts rather than just presenting the interviewees’ stories (Charmaz, 2003, p.327). During each interview, I took notes in order to help me develop a coding scheme. After each interview and for each answer, I used cards to write all responses (from the transcripts and notes) briefly and gave each answer a code. Then after I finished coding all interview texts, I tried to find all commonalities or differences in the interviewees’ experiences and stories. For each commonality or difference, I put them under one category and “a word or phrase [was] selected to title it-in terms used by the research participants” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000,

p.281). Key themes (categories) that were developed from the interview texts were used initially as a starting stage, and new themes were added during the coding procedure “to preserve the conceptual richness of phenomenon studies” (p.281). All these categories were added to one memo in order to facilitate the analytic process.

In the next stage, I found that there were gaps among some categories and their relationships. Thus, I returned to the interview discourses, especially the early ones, in order to complete these gaps. I used theoretical sampling in order to find connections between the categories and raise it to “concepts in the emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2003, p.325). Finally, as Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000) say “the resulting grounded theory is a description of this hierarchical category structure, including relationships among the categories and between categories and the data” (p. 282).

## Chapter Four: Analysis

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the interview texts in order to address and answer research questions. By examining each narrative interview, I present respondents' discourses that were generated from the coding phase and organized depending on certain themes.

### Source of Political Information

In the midst of the Egyptian turbulence, expatriate Egyptians living across the globe had concerns and worries about their homeland. It was axiomatic that they wanted to know all of the latest political facts and make sure that Egyptians were safe, particularly their families, their friends, and the protesters in Tahrir Square. Thus, diasporic Egyptians were eager to know the latest political news and tried to find many ways to do so. Throughout the interview, it was essential to ask participants questions about their sources of political information and talk with them about their favored sources. In general, sources ranged from TV channels, cable and domestic; the internet, including social media and news websites; and from their families, through phone or Facebook. A general example of what respondents said about their sources during the Egyptian revolution of 2011 was:

*Generally, I got information from my family. Also, I got information from the internet...from Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, and Al-Youm Al-Sabea, and social media, such as Facebook.*

#### *TV Channels as a Source of Political Information*

During each discourse context, it was necessary to talk and address with respondents the TV channels as sources of political information for the Egyptians and even millions of people in the Arab region and world at that time. Currently, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya news channels are considered the most popular and watched satellite news channels in the Arab region, especially in Saudi Arabia. Nearly all respondents agreed that they watched these two channels during the



Egyptian uprising because they reported all of the revolution's stories with 24 hours coverage. A few said that they spent time on watching BBC Arabic news channel.

*Generally, my source was from TV and the internet. With TV channels, for example, ON TV channel was the main channel and then BBC Arabic.*

Despite that, among respondents, there were arguments about these channels, especially about Al-Jazeera; several said that they were proactive and credible in conveying the Egyptian uprising news.

*I want to say that domestic Egyptian channels broadcasted fabricated news. In contrast to them, Al-Jazeera news channel and Facebook reported exactly what was happening in Tahrir Square. If something really happened, you can find it in Facebook and Al-Jazeera. Me: Do you mean that local Egyptian channels had no creditability in reporting their news?*

*No, not little, it was a lot. Al-Jazeera news reported true news about the uprising. During the revolution, domestic Egyptian channels said: the situation in Egypt was quiet, in contrast to Al-Jazeera, they reported clashes.*

Others criticized these two channels, in particular Al-Jazeera, saying that they carried false news and ignited strifes among Egyptians, as one respondents explained:

*Al-Jazeera channel and website pumped, ignited the issue, and posted false pictures and supported the pictures with video shots that made you more excited. I opened Facebook and my focus was on communicating with my family and friends to know the reality. I see that media, television and Facebook, are tools to update things, to ignite wars, and cause strife among people.*

Throughout the revolution days, along with Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya news channels, the Egyptian community in Saudi Arabia was keen to watch Egyptian channels. Egyptian channels are comprised of public sector and private sector channels. Public sector channels, which are moderated by the government, include Egyptian local channels, Egyptian Satellite Channel (ESC), and Nile TV channels. Examples of private sector channels are Dream TV, Al-Hayat TV, Elmehwar TV, CBC Arabic, and ON TV channel.

Regarding the Egyptian channels, a couple of respondents confirmed that they watched talk show programs, including Alashera Masaa, 90 Minutes, and Al-hayat Al-Youm, while one

respondent watched Huna Al-Qahira, and another one watched Akher Kalam. These talk show programs have been presented on private Egyptian channels, which were not carrying the government's voice. Moreover, talk show programs enticed respondents' attention because they introduced popular political analysts and talked about the current events and the latest stories at that time, and participants valued their political perceptions. More importantly, many media professionals were against the previous regime, and most of the talk show programs were on the youths' side. Respondents who watched talk show programs classified information depending on the channel, talk show program, and the interviewees. However, one respondent recognized that clean media professionals were few at that time and people need to be cognizant how to distinguish correct information. He said:

*Each channel has its own trend. For example, with talk show programs, I evaluated the information depending on the interviewer and whom the owner of the channel is biased to. Such as the President's departure speech or the President's speech to implore people, each channel addressed them in a certain way... I made my classification depending on each one's reference, their thoughts, their backgrounds, and affiliations. For example, there were so many people sympathizing with the President and saying that people need to walk out of Tahrir Square. At the same time, like Elbaradei, "The April 6 Youth Movement," "Kefaya movement," important talk show programs, such as Akher Kalam, condemned and asked people not to leave the Square but to continue until the President steps down. Not because the channel, website, Facebook, or a broadcaster said information we believe them. I knew the principle of each person from the analysis of the situation. For example, Tamer Amin and Khairy Ramadan in the Egyptian channels had the same trend; they were talking with the government's and the Egyptian TV's tongue. Their words were directed to a specific group of people. At that time, clean media professionals were rare (only two or three were clean).*

Similarly, another interviewee concurred that every channel has its personal style in conveying news:

*I know each channel's trend, one wanted Foluoul, other was with the revolution side, and one was with Christians. I knew each broadcaster's point of view and all of them were looking for their personal interests. I am one of the people who spent 6 to 7 hours in front of talk show program, but I felt that Al-Jazeera had a goal, point of view, and credible news.*

Many respondents confirmed that watching TV channels was an essential; however, not all stories and news were correct, especially local Egyptian channels. Many of them agreed that local channels were the voice of the Egyptian government and their allies. The previous regime used media to deploy news that was contrary to the fact, as one participant perceived:

*Information from domestic Egyptian TV and newspapers was misleading.*

Although one respondent watched ON TV, another respondent explained that she stopped watching ON TV during the revolution and argued that this channel was with previous Egyptian administration:

*I watched Al-Jazeera news channel and ON TV previously. During the revolution, people stopped watching ON TV channel because it was with the regime and most of the good reporters and broadcasters, who were with the revolution, went from the channel. No one watched domestic Egyptian channels because they were with the government.*

As a matter of fact, respondents watched local Egyptian channels as a foregone conclusion to see what local Egyptian channels had missed, as one respondent noted.

*I watched Egyptian channels only to know what they excluded, not about what they reported. I watched Al-Jazeera because it reported the news extensively and then came Al-Arabiya. Over the time, during the revolution, I switched from Al-Jazeera to Al-Arabiya because I noticed that Al-Jazeera was biased with weak credibility.*

Therefore, whether participants watched Egyptian local channels or not, most of them had the same essence that local channels (public sector channels) deployed deceptive news dedicated for their objectives. Consider the following example:

*Local media and the former regime were deploying false news. For example: in Mohamed Mahmoud Square, Egypt, the Egyptian media said that no one had been killed. After one day we discovered from Facebook and Twitter that the number of victims exceeded 70 people. Egyptian media misled and had orders not to publish the facts.*

One respondent compared international news channels, such as the French channel, along with Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, with local Egyptian channels to validate information:

*I did not watch the Egyptian channels because I did not believe them and they could be misleading. I watched CBC Arabic, CBN, and Arabic channels, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, and I compared them and the French channel to know if they gave true information or not.*

Another interviewee confronted TV channels, for example, Al-Faraeen and CBC Arabic news channels, and talk show programs, for instance, Alashera Masaa and 90 Minutes; the internet; and news from family and friends. He said TV channels can be biased to certain trends in Egypt and information from the internet can be erroneous. For that reason, he corroborated news from his family, as he noted:

In TV news or programs, some parties, aspects, or entities can affect the receiver. But when communicating with the family or friends to know the truth, which they are living, we can see that many stations are alleging some information. Information from the family is true. I compared my family's information and channels' information, such as Al-Fareen, CBC news, 90 minutes, Al- Alashera Masaa, and some analysts or experts, there were people who cared about the country, while others followed certain currents in order to satisfy some parties or some of the top leaders in the country.

#### *Electronic News as a Source of Political Information*

Many participants used the internet to surf electronic news channels, such as Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, and BBC Arabic. More importantly, Out of 17 respondents, 11 said that Al-Youm Al-Sabea was the most common preferable electronic website among others during the revolution. Al-Youm Al-Sabea is an Egyptian daily electronic newsletter <http://www1.youm7.com/>. Al-Ahram and Al-shrooq electronic news had few followers. A couple of participants followed Al-Masri Al-Youm and Masrawi news sites, while Kalmti, Al-bashayer, Al-Akhbar, and Al-dostoor Al-asly were followed by one participant. Also, another respondent followed the news through Google and Yahoo websites. Al-Youm Al-Sabea website was distinctive because it covered all the revolution events second by second, as the respondents stated:

*The best one was Al-Youm Al-Sabea because they are honest and closer to us. They said the news that actually happened...quick news and had credibility...and I think they won the best news website in the Middle East.*

Likewise:

*The most credible news site was Al-Youm Al-Sabea because it followed up events second-by-second, and the least credible news site was Al-bashayer.*

In addition to its credibility, Al-Youm Al-Sabea was the best in coverage of all political events in Egypt.

*I read Al-Youm Al-Sabea and another website called Masdar: I knew afterwards it was for the Muslim brotherhood. Al-Youm Al-Sabea website covered all news second-by-second. Additionally, they were in the heart of the event and conveyed facts immediately after their occurrence. They put me in the picture about what was happening, which many electronic websites could not report.*

Also, a couple respondents verified that Al-Youm Al-Sabea electronic site is part of their Egyptian culture. In fact, they are accustomed to opening this electronic newspaper and reading up-to-date news every day, especially during the revolution,

*Before the revolution, the speed of the news made this website so distinctive. So when the revolution started, I followed up this site because it is known in our culture that this site publishes news quickly.*

The same was with another respondent:

*I used to open these websites, Al-Youm Al-Sabea, Masrawi, and BBC Arabic. I have them in my favorite sites and I read them all.*

Commonly, many respondents expressed that information can vary from one news website to another one, and “we will not find anyone who will say that this electronic newspaper is more credible than the other one,” as one participant specified. Another subject believed that because each e-news site has various view; recipients ought to confirm news from more than one source:

*Each website has its own style and distinctive news. We can know that the information is true when the news is repeated more than once. There is a media fabrication, that's why I try to read from more than one source to make sure that the information is correct.*

Further, to retrieve more authentic political information, one participant acknowledged that he followed international electronic news site in order to double check the credibility of the information. To take a case in point, the respondent read US, British, and Israeli press on their electronic versions as well as journalism.org before talking or deploying any political information. He stated that in the Arabic culture, people still have a deficient reliance on Arabic media:

*I usually do read the World Press. Thus, along with electronic Egyptian websites, I followed international news websites, such as journalism.org <http://www.journalism.org/>. Actually, we have a problem and lack of confidence in dealing with what Arab media says. I entered British , U.S., and Israeli press websites to see how they dealt with the event and what information that they said... To audit and double check the new information at least from two different sources and to make sure it is credible. That is why I look at the international websites before I adopt the story.*

On the other hand, one respondent said that he did not open electronic sites because most of the websites are on Facebook:

*No, I did not visit websites because most of the news and talk shows websites are available on Facebook. Examples: Al-Jazeera, BBC Arabic, and talk show programs such as the famous program Akher Kalam and 90 minute, and Mahmoud Saad when he was in Dream TV.*

As with public Egyptian news channels, one respondent stressed that he did not read Egyptian electronic news and he preferred to read the electronic versions of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, although Al-Jazeera had ways to ignite Egyptian viewers:

*I did not trust them because there are many alternative newspapers. I rarely go online and see them. Because I do not trust the Egyptian news, I read Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. However, Al-Jazeera ignited the Egyptian people and escalated the fire of sedition, but it was the most credible channel at the same time.*

One indicated that he was the chief editor of a large news website. This website's concern is in conveying a vivid picture about the Egyptians in Egypt and Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia. It also reports general and political news from Saudi Arabia and Egypt to all Egyptians

and Saudis around the world. Many Egyptians and Saudi writers post articles on this website. During the revolution, the website was a window to handle and carry information about the revolution. Moreover, it was a good political source for many expatriate Egyptians in Saudi Arabia to follow. He said:

*During the revolution, I was the chief editor of a Saudi-Egyptian website. It is the first Saudi-Egyptian website that conveys and mixes political news about the two countries. This website is a mixed and blended report from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. I wrote about what Saudis said about the January 25 revolution and what Egyptians said as well. It carried the revolution from the Egyptians' eyes to Saudis and Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia, both in Jeddah and Al-Riyadh. It is a means of communication and visual carrier. It was a pretty window to handle the revolution and still Saudis and Egyptians are following this website and expatriate Egyptians sympathize with Egyptians and youth in Egypt.*

#### *Social Media as a Source of Political Information*

Because this research is conducted to perceive how Egyptians in Saudi Arabia used social media during the uprising, one of the research requirements was that all interviewees have used social media during the revolution. Consequently, all respondents used social media with taking into account their amount of usage, which will be analyzed in the next theme. Most of them said that they used the internet and social media to be conversant with all what was happening in Egypt, especially since they were not in the same country. One respondent believed that social media websites facilitated activists' movements and gave her a glimpse about the events. She said:

*My sources were television channels and online that through the internet. I took information from the Internet, in particular the websites are interested in the Egyptian event. For instance, during the protests, there were many activists who were sending their locations and organizing people on where to go and where not to go on streets. All these messages were sent through social media.*

In using social media, apparently YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook were the most prominently visited platforms by respondents to obtain political information on the revolution

days through social media. Specifically, all respondents agreed that they used YouTube to check the latest posted videos about what was happening in Tahrir Square, Cairo, as one interviewee noted, “To watch the latest events about the revolution and riots.” Another respondent said he accessed YouTube videos from Facebook.

*I went to the YouTube website because sometimes a video was attached with information and because I like to see the news with a picture or video.*

As well, one respondent explained:

*I entered YouTube from Facebook when I wanted to watch interviews or events about the revolution.*

Further, Twitter is another popular social media platform that was used by activists during the revolution and had an instrumental role throughout the Egyptian revolution. When respondents were asked about their source of political information at that time, Twitter followers were few. Using Twitter as source of political news was not significant for Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia. In fact, among participants, few respondents said that they have Twitter accounts and use them only to follow others, whether celebrities, scientists, or politicians, for many reasons. Reasons were similar because subjects wanted to read popular people’s perspectives in general as one respondent explained:

*I have an account and I followed the most important politicians and writers in the Arab world, such as pages Yasir Rezg, Mohamad Al-Shamaa, and Mohamad Al-Arfaj.*

Correspondingly,

*I followed some popular people’s tweets, such as Ahmad Zuwail, Dr.Mohamd Al-Baradei, Dr.Hazem Abu Ismaael, and Madenat Altechnologia.*

Another respondent noted that he followed important Egyptian people on Twitter because they had up-to-date information. He said:

*On Twitter, I followed Mustafa Bakri, Nader Bakar, big people in Egypt because they had the latest news.*



A couple respondents said that they have Twitter accounts; however, they did not use it. Rather, they used Facebook as an alternative, as one noted, “I have an account on Twitter, but I did not use it. I used Facebook and news websites.” Another interviewee followed general tweets without specific names because he preferred Facebook more than Twitter. He commended Facebook by giving a metaphor that Facebook is his *original home*:

*I do not remember specific pages. I just log on Twitter and read quickly. Then I go to my original home, Facebook.*

Twitter allows only 140 characters to write and share news, however, Facebook has more space to share opinions and upload pictures, as one subject explained:

*The difference between Twitter and Facebook: Twitter is a brief message; while in Facebook we can post articles and videos.*

The Egyptian revolution is known as the “Facebook revolution” because cyberactivists used Facebook as an instrument to coordinate protests and organize their activities. Furthermore, latest information was posted and shared through Facebook by millions of Egyptian account owners who are living in Egypt. Millions of people around the globe followed this historical event through Facebook, including Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia. It appears that there was a consensus among participants to the fact that Facebook was number one in following up the revolution news. On Facebook, there are personal, group, and electronic news pages. Overall, most participants revealed that they read personal Facebook pages of Egyptian people who were in Egypt at that time in order to view the latest and fresh news. These personal pages include friends, relatives, journalists, politicians, and media professionals, as one respondent noted:

*I communicated with a very large segment of people through my page on Facebook and I had journalists and politicians as friends on my page. I got up to date information from them on what was happening. Of course, I was far away and they were in the heart of the event. I often got information that was not published elsewhere... And for many reasons I was so keen that I did not disseminate any new information on my page.*

Furthermore,

I communicated *and knew information* through my friends on Facebook. My friends shared specific news or stories, and I entered and watched them all.

Similarly,

*I have my own page and I write every day on my page. Also, I have my friends, media professionals, and journalists on my account. Examples of Facebook pages are: Manal Al-Shareef and Al-Batool Al-Hashimya pages.*

Facebook in general is a good opportunity for Egyptians in the diaspora to meet with their families and friends as a small community, as one respondent said:

*The sweetest thing on Facebook is that I have my own group (my friends) and I can communicate with them and with people in Egypt, so we are all together in the same place... I feel that I am setting with them... when I see something new, I send it to them immediately and then they comment. That is the difference.*

Additionally, one respondent explained that Facebook is a sufficient place for all his needs. He compared Facebook with Twitter and Skype, as he expressed:

*I sit for long hours on Facebook because it is the site where I can mingle with people, and most of my friends have Facebook accounts. I found everything on Facebook and this made me not go to other sites. In Skype we just talk; Facebook, on the other hand, has awesome information. That is why it is the closest thing to me. I did not try to make an account on Twitter.*

Many interviewees expressed that another reason to use Facebook during the revolution was to get fast and accurate political information from their families, relatives, and friends in Egypt through reading their shared posts or chatting with them. On the contrary, a few respondents contended that they did not get information from their families because they are living far away from where demonstrations were held (Tahrir Square). Many admitted that they were anxious to get information from activists themselves in Facebook in Tahrir Square, which made news and information credible and trustworthy. Getting information from the revolutionaries and activists themselves was the most credible source to validate the news, as one respondent said:

*Generally, I got my information from the revolutionaries themselves through the internet, then Facebook, and then from electronic news websites, which follow up the daily affair over the moment. Also, through my cellphone; I had direct calls from youth in Tahrir Square because I seek to confirm what I heard.*

To keep up with the sought evolving pace, TV news channels, talk show programs, newspapers, electronic news, political analysts, and media professionals joined the advanced technology and created accounts under their names in social media, such as on Twitter and Facebook. This feature allows users to follow the latest news and sustain relationships with their preferred pages. Several participants who watched TV news channels and talk show programs said that they visited their Facebook pages, for instance, Al-Ahram, Al-Akhbar, Al-Hayat al-Youm and Akher Kalam Facebook pages. One participant commended one media professional and his talk show program Akher Kalam, thus, he liked his page on Facebook. He explained:

*I liked Yousri Foda's Facebook page. Yousri Foda is a formative star who had a talk show program called Akher Kalam. He is conscientious person who worked in many world press institutions and has a good experience in this field. He has logical analysis and is not biased to one party without another one. His Facebook page belongs to his talk show program.*

Since Al-Youm Al-Sabea news website was preferred by many respondents, a few said that they liked its Facebook page.

Before and during the revolution, there have been many Facebook groups who called for the revolution, demanded political reform, and devoted all of their efforts to convey new news about events, in particular in Tahrir Square. Examples of Facebook group pages were noted by one respondent:

*Examples of Facebook pages were "The April 6 Youth Movement," "Hezb Alnowab," "El Horeya well Adala," "25 January," "Youm althawra ala altazeeb we alfaqr we alfasad we albatala," "Qowat almajles al askari," and "25 January alhorra." These pages write about and defend martyrs and talk about the old regime and corruption. They were calling for the removal of the old regime and demanding for freedom, justice and exterminating the injustice because billions were stolen and President Mubarak did not make anything. We enter, read, and take new information from these pages.*

Further,

*I liked Facebook pages, such as "We are all Khalid Said," "The April 6 Youth Movement," "Shabakat Khabar," "Shabakat Akbar masr," "25 January Youm Althawra Ala Altazeeb we Alfaqr we Alfasad we Aalbatala." These pages were so distinctive because they brought up-to-date news live from the field (Tahrir Square) using documented pictures, videos, and voices. These pages brought witnesses.*

Precisely, from all respondents who liked Facebook pages, the "We are all Khalid Said" group page had the most visited and liked page during the uprising; as one respondent said, "We are all Khalid Said' Facebook page was number one." Another participant discussed the reasons why "We are all Khalid Said" Facebook group page was the most popular page during the revolution. He said:

*"We are all Khaled Said" page was the most popular Facebook page during the revolution and I followed it very well. It was moderated by Wael Ghonim and contained great and latest news about the uprising, supporting their news with pictures and documents.*

In addition, "The April 6 Youth Movement" Facebook group page had its share of reading by a few participants. As one participant indicated:

*I followed "Mosh Hamshi Men Tahrir," "The April 6 Youth Movement," and "Kolen Essam Ali" pages because most of the people who wrote in these pages were activists in Tahrir Square.*

While many interviewers agreed that the "We are all Khalid Said" group page was the best page for them, a couple respondents said that page names were not important; what was important was the quality of information and news without any prejudice.

*I liked many news pages and then new news was sent to my Facebook page. I did have a specific page because some pages, such as "We Are All KhalidSsaid," were biased to the issue. I read important news that interested me as an Egyptian person about Egypt's situation in general. I do not read specific things.*

Moreover,

*I did not dwell on the name; I focused on what is the news, not on the group name.*

On the other hand, a couple respondents confessed that they were hesitant not to like Facebook pages or visit news websites, especially before Mubarak's departure, because it was possible that these pages or sites would be monitored by the previous regime. One participant refused to give examples of the most visited websites and Facebook pages because it might be sensitive for him and could lead to negative consequences:

*I explored many websites and Facebook pages and took excerpts during the revolution. I prefer not to say the names because it is possible that there will be sensitivity. I am here in the Kingdom about 22 years. There are many things happened to me and these websites can be monitored. I do not want to get into clashes. I did not enter news sites because it was possible that there were be sensitivity in some cases.*

Similarly, one participant confessed that he explored Facebook pages during the revolution without liking them.

*I did not like any page during the revolution, even "We are all Khalid Said" page. I did not like Facebook page during the revolution. I explored information in those pages during the revolution, but I did not enter them after the revolution.*

#### *Family and Friends as a source of political information*

For Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia, one political source stemmed directly from their families, their friends, or from activists in Tahrir Square. For example, many rumors were launched through TV channels and social media. Thus, in addition to other sources, Egyptians abroad wanted to be informed with up-to-the-minute news from trusted people. Several interviewees affirmed that families and friends in Egypt helped them to enrich their political sources through the phone or social media. For example,

*My primary source was from media, then my children in Egypt through phone to know the actual action. Also, I got information from media, including the internet and TV.*

By the same token,

*I took facts from my friends on Facebook. They shared on their pages and I read them all.*

More importantly, one said that he had daily dialogues with his family about the Egyptian events for up to 4 hours a day. He said,

*Although my family lives in the eastern province of Cairo, which was far away from the event, there were many conversations with my wife and children in Egypt about the events, and we were talking up to 3 or 4 times daily.*

One participant said that she was raised in a political and national atmosphere in her surrounding family, which comes from the fact that her father was a revolutionary when she was young. That is why most of her political information emanated from the father. She explained,

*My primary source of political information was from my father because he is a revolutionary and he was detained couple of times. That is why I have a lot of political information because my cultural history, my thoughts, and what is in my brain are from my father. During the days of the revolution I was communicating with my dad and he told me what was happening back there*

However, a few respondents said that generally they did not get information from their families or friends in Egypt because they did not contact them very often or they were far away from Tahrir Square in Cairo (the revolutionaries' place).

*I did not get any information from my family or friends because I do not have any direct people who live in Cairo; most of my friends and my family live outside Cairo.*

Likewise, one respondent noted that information from his family was not accurate because they live far from outside Cairo.

*My family lives far away from Cairo and they received information about activists in Tahrir Square but they were not sure about its credibility.*

Also,

*I did not get any information from my family because most of my family is here.*

Getting information from the revolutionaries and activists themselves was the most credible source to validate political news, as one respondent said:

*Generally, I got my information from the revolutionaries themselves through the internet, then Facebook, and then from electronic news websites, which follow up the daily affair moment by moment. Also, through cellphone...I had direct calls from youth in Tahrir Square because I sought to confirm what I heard.*

Further, a couple said that they did not trust the internet as a source of information; they only trusted activists who had been in Tahrir Square.

*I did not trust other websites. I only trusted people who were in Tahrir Square because it is better to take direct information from the activists in the Square.*

Therefore, respondents took refuge in social media, particularly Facebook, as well as family and friends in Egypt to authenticate information that was derived from TV and electronic news sites.

#### *Source of Political Information During the Internet Shutdown*

When the January 25 demonstrations began in Egypt, the Egyptian government felt in danger. Thus, the internet was cutoff for almost five days as well as cell phones in some areas (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). Accordingly, cyberactivists in Egypt could not access social media platforms and post the latest news. Moreover, diasporic Egyptians, especially those who relied on receiving news directly from activists, family members, and friends in Egypt through social media sites, have altered their sources of political news and relied on other sources. For interviewees, most of them relied on TV channels when the internet was shut down in Egypt during the uprising. To illustrate, they watched talk show programs and TV political analysts, as one participant said:

*Sure my source of information differed. My source was talk show programs on TV such as, Alashera Masaa and Al-hayat Al-youm. My approach moved and became TV more than the internet. I almost shut down the internet and Facebook during the internet interruption in Egypt.*

One interviewee pointed out that most of TV programs were misleading people. In particular, before Mubark's stepped down, he watched these programs until the internet was restored:

*I relied on news and political analysts on TV. Communications were interrupted, so I relied on TV. There was misled and blackout about what was happening in the arena, until Mubarak stepped down and then the vision was elucidated. Consequently, I went back online and views returned back.*

Other examples of TV channels were Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya which had the highest rate in watching news channels during the Egyptian uprising:

*The shutdown period was considered influential for us. We had Al-Jazeera, and landline phones did not stop. I moved to TV more, which means if I talked for an hour or two a day, the remaining twenty-two hours were oriented to TV.*

Similarly,

*I closed Facebook and watched Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.*

One admired some political writers' perspectives in Saudi newspapers:

*Some political experts in Saudi newspapers had a good vision, like Mr. Moneim Mustafa and Ashraf Qandil, and are experts in politics.*

Not only was TV the main political source for interviewees during the absence of the internet, but also several noted that their families and friends were their source of political information throughout landline phones or cell phones (for those who had not faced cell phones cut off problems with their people in Egypt):

*I used Landline phone to know information from my family and friends because there was no Facebook pages and no website that had up-to-date information.*

The same was the case with this respondent:

*My source was changed one hundred percent. The phone was closed to me all the time and I tried to remain in contact with my family and friends to check on them and know new information. We took the right information from people. Further, I derived my information from other sites, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.*

A few said that they followed electronic news sites, for example, *Al-Youm Al-Sabea* and *Rassd* electronic news sites in order to know the latest news in Egypt. As one respondent talked about *Al-Youm Al-Sabea*:

*I did not know any news from Facebook or Twitter because there was no connection and the internet was shut down for two days. I knew the news only through electronic news sites, such as Al-Youm Al-Sabea. It is a good website and more credible than many sites and most expatriates read it because it conveys the truth.*



A couple of them cited Rassd News as an alternative choice for their political information during the shutdown of the internet. They realized that this website did a marvelous job in conveying the latest news, specifically during the internet interruption. One compared news from his brother with Rassd news on *The Day of Anger*, he noted:

*From my experience, I read Rassd to see new news. For example, on The Day of Anger, Rassd described exactly what was happening and wrote about the real battle on the streets. I called my brother through a landline phone because cellphones were cut off in order to take the latest news. He confirmed what Rassd News said and told me: did you notice how they are conveying new news and doing a good job.*

At the same pace, the other respondent pointed out the same positive feature in Rassd, but with some reservations because Rassd might have leaked false information with correct news. He said:

*I read Rassd News because they carried the event, but I feared from them at the same time. When I entered their page during the revolution, especially on 28 January during the internet shutdown, they had a potential to deliver new information. Rassd explained demonstrations' places with street names. Then I discovered that the information was correct. It happened. Scary news, that's why I entered it timidly...News was transferred correctly, but I was afraid because it can be packaged with correct news, then leak what they want under the name of news. (If you want to poison a chocolate you need to put it in a good chocolate that is coated with cellophane). Information needs to be correct to leak what you want.*

Receiving information from Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya Facebook pages was adequate for one participant during the internet outage:

*I received on my page information from all news channels such as, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya and did not feel the interruption of the internet because I am out of Egypt. In Egypt, they felt the interruption for a short period.*

Furthermore, one indicated that along with other political sources, he followed international news on the internet trying to fetch up-to-date information, as he noted:

*It was a big problem. I relied on my communications, international news, TV cable channels, and direct personal communications.*

The political source for one respondent, however, was not impacted with the internet outage in Egypt because he did not access social media daily:

*I was not affected because I did not log on Facebook every day.*

Therefore, nearly all interviewees changed their political sources from social media networking sites to other sources, such as, TV, phones, and/or electronic news sites when the internet was cut off during the Egyptians events.

### **The Use of the Internet and Social Media during the Revolution**

As this study documents how Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia used social media, questions about the extent to which the internet and social media were used during the uprising had to be posed. Namely, how many hours per day did the Egyptians use the internet, such as electronic news websites, and social media during the revolution period? To ease the analysis and facilitate answers to the respondents, answers were divided in three choices: less than two hours, between two and four hours, and more than four hours. Questions about the places Egyptians had access to the internet and social media sites were asked, as well as their preferred language when writing on websites and social media platforms.

#### *The Internet (Hours per Day and Location)*

Many interviewees used the internet more than four hours per day. Specifically, some of them used the internet more than six hours, and one used it more than 14 hours per day. Several respondents logged on the internet between two and four hours, while a couple confirmed they used the internet for less than two hours. In general, nearly all of them accessed the internet and social media networking sites from home and work because they were interested and eager to learn up-to-date information. A few of them started to pay more attention to the internet or social media after January 25, as discussed in the previous section. Most of them logged on from

laptops either at home or work, and more than half of them logged on from their cell phones, while a few used desktop computers to explore the internet and social media.

#### *Social Media (Hours per Day and Language)*

Several participants used social media more than four hours per day. A few of them used it between 10 to 14 hours. For the same number of respondents, social media platforms were accessed between two to four hours, while a few participants used social media during the Egyptian events. Thus, in general, respondents spent more time browsing up-to-date information about the Egyptian events on news electronic sites than social media sites. On the other hand, most of them had used social media extensively during the revolution. In fact, there is a substantial increase in the use of social media during and after the revolution.

For their preferred language, most of them used the Arabic language when they commented on Social media sites, such as Facebook. Several used English to write, while a few used Franco Arab (Arabic written in English letters). Of all respondents, a few said that they used both Arabic and English; while a couple said they used Arabic and Franco Arab.

#### **Type of Communication Modes with People**

Throughout the uprising events, Egyptians outside Egypt were concerned about the safety of their parents, siblings, spouses, children, and friends, even if they were far from Tahrir Square. To communicate with them, they used different means, such as cell phones, landline phones, and the internet. When the internet and cell phones were interrupted in some areas, especially around Tahrir Square, respondents were more anxious about their families and friends and tried to use different communication modes other than the usual one.

### *Communication Modes during the Revolution*

All interviewees except one concurred that they used the telephone (cell phones and/or landline phones) to call their families or friends during the revolution to make sure they were fine, even if they were far away from the protests and demonstrations at that time, as one respondent explained:

*My family was not involved in politics; however, I was concerned about them at the beginning of the protests.*

Of the 16 participants (who used the telephone to call homeland), most of the participants used it to communicate along with other communication modes. Many said that they only used phone (cell phone and/or landline phone) to communicate with their families:

*I called my family every day to make sure that they were fine and they did not have any problems... But I did not have any direct friends or relatives from people who were in Tahrir Square. I was checking with them every day through the cell phone (mobile). I did not use video calls or Skype to communicate with my family or friends.*

Similarly,

*My family was far away from what happened. My sister has a shop in Al-Tahrir Square, but it was closed during the uprising...So I used the phone with my siblings and my family in general.*

Along with phones, other participants used the internet, such as Facebook chat, Skype, Yahoo MSN, Microsoft MSN, Viber, and/or Tango to communicate with their families and relatives. Specifically, the primary means after phone were Skype and Facebook. Several participants who used Skype video calls also said they used Facebook to chat with friends and families:

*I used Facebook with my wife, Yahoo voice chat, SKYPE, cell phone three to four times daily or more during some hot events, such as January 25.*

Finally, only one participant noted that he did not use any communication mode to connect with his family because most of them were in Saudi Arabia. He said:

*I did not communicate with relatives in Egypt because most of my family is here in Saudi Arabia.*

#### *Communication Modes During the Shutdown of the Internet*

During the revolution, the government interrupted the internet for five days. Many Egyptians could not communicate with people in Egypt through the internet, for instance, Skype, as one participant said: *“I used the internet to communicate with people in Egypt, but during the internet shutdown I could not communicate with them through Skype for four days. Other than that, most of my calls were through Skype.”* Moreover, cell phone service was cut off, especially in Tahrir Square where youth and Egyptian activists gathered for demonstrations, as one respondent noted:

*It was not switched off in all Egypt...The government cut the lines in the main assembly areas.*

Respondents were concerned about their families in Egypt, in particular when they were without police in Egypt:

*I called my family every day to make sure that they were okay, especially when there was a period of time Egypt was without police and people made popular committees to protect their families from criminals. My siblings went on the streets and worked in those committees because criminals were everywhere on the streets. I called them every day on their landline phone and cellphones.*

Thus, interviewees tried to use other communication modes to communicate with family members. Of the 17 participants, many of them used landline phones as a substitute to call their families:

*During the internet shutdown, landline phones were the only way to communicate with people in Egypt. The internet and cellphones were switched off.*

Further,

*Cell phone services were interrupted, but landline phones were working somewhat. I was communicating with my family through landline phone. Phone services in Cairo area were destroyed.*

A couple said, “*I could not communicate with my family at all in Egypt,*” while another interviewee said, “*During the phone shutdown, I did not communicate with them for one week.*” Lastly, as previously mentioned, one of the interviewees was not sure because he did not have to communicate with his family back there in Egypt. He said:

*I did not communicate with family because the family is here.*

On the other hand, several participants argued that cell phones were not cut off or were not sure, and they did not have problems or interruptions in calling their relatives:

*I do not remember... It was a short period. I used cell phone normally and I did not have any problems. Even the internet was shut down, the cell phone was working. I do not recall that the cutoff was at the same time.*

Also,

*I used cell phone to communicate with my father and brothers. The cell phone was not shut down, or maybe it was during the days that I did not call my dad.*

One respondent stated that some friends in an Egyptian telecom company assisted him in calling his family in Egypt,

*The cell phone was cut off. I have friends who work in a telecommunication company; they helped me call my family. They called my family and then connected me.*

In general, diasporic Egyptians found different means in order to reach people in Egypt and make sure they were fine, as one respondent endorsed. She said:

*Communication was not cut between people because the internet was shut down in Egypt. There were other ways. We tried and used many ways to communicate with people in Egypt.*

### **The Role of the Egyptians in Social Media**

As it has been demonstrated that social media was an associated factor in inciting Egyptian revolutionaries to take to the streets, how social media was used by the expatriate Egyptians, on the other hand, is still blurred. Expatriate Egyptians logged onto the internet and

social media to acquire advanced information about the Egyptian events. Not only was reading new information a main reason for expatriate Egyptians to log onto social media networking sites, but also participating in discussions with Egyptian revolutionaries and giving opinions were other main reasons. Examples of how respondents participated and used the internet generally and social media specifically during the revolution and elections are discussed below.

### *How Egyptians Used Social Media During the Egyptian Events*

To begin with, during the interview discourses, several respondents confessed that it was hard for them to be abroad and feel helpless. They wanted to be with the revolutionaries to support their country. The only thing they could do was to pray for them and share new information in Facebook or Twitter:

*I wanted to be with my family and friends and Egyptians in Tahrir Square to defend my country. I wanted to participate to demand for good living and justice.*

In the same way,

*Actually there is no role that I can do except to receive information and pray for them, for example, Allah with you. Do you know how I felt? I wrote we are with you, but sometimes you feel that you are shy to write it because you cannot do anything.*

These feelings gave diasporic Egyptians the incentive to participate in social media networking sites by discussing their opinions, sharing information, and uploading new pictures.

Most participants concurred on commenting, discussing, and sharing new news about the Egyptian events during the uprising. Precisely, many respondents said that they wrote comments on Facebook, became involved in many discussions, and tried to defend their opinions as much as they could, as one participant noted:

*For sure I gave my opinion and we discussed many things about the uprising and the events. When I see that the other party, whom I am discussing with, is against the activists and what they are doing on the streets, I begin to defend them. For example, when someone sympathizes with Mubarak and says that he is not a thief; I start to write and give my opinion. Another example, if someone says you do not have any mercy for*

*Mubarak and he is oppressed, no I feel that I need to say my opinion and respond to him that now it is over and many things were stolen.*

As a part of discussing and sharing opinions in Facebook, one participant said that when discussing the Egyptian events with people on Facebook, he tried to engage others by asking questions to create an open dialogue. He explained:

*If the page has a discussion board, we discuss about a subject and we take the members' opinion. What is your opinion about what is happening in Tahrir Square? What do you think of the revolution? What are the people's demands?*

Another respondent wrote and posted articles on his page discussing his political views about the revolution in many Facebook groups. He gave a metaphor to describe his desire that his site only reported valuable information. He noted:

*I posted and wrote articles on my page. I commented and discussed my opinion in many Facebook groups, such as Manal al-Shareef and Al-Batool Al-Hashimya. We talked about the revolution and the latest political developments. I commented and responded to a lot of wrong and false news because we did not want to blow on the ashes.*

“Blow on the ashes” is an Arabic metaphor roughly equivalent to the English “be full of hot air.”

In addition, several participants said that they posted the latest news and important information about corruptions, such as smuggling funds, or new movements, such as “The April 6 Youth Movement,” in order to inform people who had not heard about these new events, as one interviewee explained:

*I feel that sharing new news is more important than making comments, especially when I feel that what I read is important and people can benefit from it. During the revolution, I read and entered everything. We outside Egypt do not have anything more than this for helping people there. I was a member of many pages and talked with people, such as The National Association for Change. I talked and discussed with youth members. But the most important thing to me was to share new news and introduce distinctive movements to people, such as “April Youth Movement.” I found once a special report about smuggling funds and I was keen to share it through Facebook for those people who did not hear about this information. I have a Twitter account. I logged in once or twice, but each time I returned to Facebook because I am so associated with it and most of my friends are there.*



Sharing political news and the latest information was essential and more important than just commenting on Facebook, according to one interviewee who shared his perspectives:

*I shared news and information without writing comments. I shared any important event, news or an incident, for example, political news, statements from the Military Council, or new news from political parties such as hizb Al-horeya Wel adala or Wafd.*

Not only sharing up-to-date news on Facebook users was important, but also distributing credible information was significant as well:

*I participated a lot. I used to read the comments and publish news if I am sure about its credibility as a kind of awareness to people. I read a lot of news and if I felt it was not correct or something was wrong about its credibility...I did not convey that news. However, I shared correct news and wrote my comments for my friends in order to benefit from them. I took part in many discussions and always took the oppressed side.*

Also, a few expatriate Egyptians uploaded factual pictures about the violence in Egypt at that time, according to one respondent:

*I uploaded pictures on Facebook and Twitter, after I made sure that they are correct, and share them to all people to see it, especially those who did not see these pictures outside Egypt. I wanted them to see the latest pictures with the smallest details the injustice, and what was happening in the country from shed blood. We demand freedom, justice, and free elections.*

One respondent confessed that he was one of the people who asked to adopt Khalid Said's incident as a small *snowball* to grow it. He communicated with youth and revolutionaries in Egypt during the revolution and agreed that enthusiasm needs to have a vision, an idea, and a goal in order to achieve its objectives. He stated:

*I feel responsible toward the generation before the Revolution. They need someone to explain and discuss with them. Explanation does not come on Twitter. On Facebook, I can explain dimensions and backgrounds of what is going on. At the very beginning, 7 or 8 months prior to the revolution, I was one of those who suggested the idea to invest Khalid Said's incident as a small snowball, which should grow. I interacted strongly with this investment on "We are all Khalid Said" group page. Then, when ElBaradei came I intensified my participation in this direction. I communicated with media professionals, ordinary people, or youth in Egypt by phone, and we undertook*

*an operation dubbed “Al-Tanweer” (the enlightenment). That enthusiasm does not always lead us to the right way. We need with enthusiasm a vision, an idea, and a goal. We need to control the tools to reach our goals. I was very keen to connect to young people who participated in the revolution.*

A few said that some discussions, especially in politics, may take another trend and people start to insult each other. For that reason, if this happened, they prefer to withdraw from the discussion so the conversation does not evolve from the main dialogue, as one participant clarified. She said:

*I wrote comments...I tried to convince people about my views in the revolution. Sometimes I clashed with people and when they insulted me I withdrew and closed Facebook. When I felt that those people would not understand and accept my opinion, I withdrew and closed it.*

Similarly,

*I have always been disgruntled with the former regime and all my comments were against the former regime. When I saw any news, I commented beneath the news. For example, I commented about Mubarak’s police or about the former regime. However, I rarely delved into discussions because if I engaged in discussions, it was possible to evolve and get into other areas that I did not want. People speak in politics, and then suddenly it developed to insult. I do not like these fields.*

Moreover, one interviewee did not talk to his relative as result from Facebook discussions:

*For Facebook, I had a lot of problems from Facebook. I clashed about my opinion with many people. I have not talked with one of my relatives since the revolution days because he is a police officer who has a particular faith with the previous regime that this was not a revolution.*

Using social media platforms, such as Facebook, gave Egyptians in Saudi Arabia the opportunity to elucidate and respond to all explanations from their friends outside Egypt about the Egyptian events, such as why protests and political movements were performed in Tahrir Square, particularly with friends in Saudi Arabia. One respondent explained that he described to Saudi friends on Facebook about the real situation at that time in Egypt. He said:

*My friends from Saudi Arabia asked about what was happening. I explained to them through Facebook about the corrupt system... I explained only.*

Another interviewee admitted that she illustrated what was happening in Egypt with some Arabic friends who share the same situation, for example, Syrian and Palestinian people. They also sympathized with her during the events:

*Generally, I have many non-Egyptian friends in my account. They were sympathetic with me from the political point, for example, Syrian friends and we are still communicating with each other because they have the same issue right now. Palestinian friends posted many comments on my page. They were interested to know more about the events in Egypt.*

One respondent used his talent to express his feelings toward his country. He consecrated his pen as a kind of affiliation to Egypt and cheered the revolutionaries by writing poems and posting them on Facebook:

*Each period, when I have a certain idea, I write my comments. When something grabbed my attention, I write a poem. For poems, I write depending on my condition. Once I wrote that we need to take care of our country and I published it on Facebook. I posted my views on Facebook and made live comments on the “Al-Qahira Al-Youm” program. I said that the President’s speech was cliché and the country needs any spark to glow.*

A couple interviewees explained that they read more than they comment on Facebook. One said that sometimes he comments merely to correct false information:

*Sometimes I comment depending on the news if it was true or false. For example, during the revolution, I was reading more than commenting. Sometimes I leave comments when I have the same information from another source and I want to correct certain information.*

Another participant explained that due to his busy working hours, he did not have the time to participate in discussions on social media sites:

*Usually, I receive information and read news more than I comment. I work more than 10 hours daily, thus, I do not have the time to participate in discussions. The most important thing for me is to know the latest news.*

### *How Egyptians used Social Media During the Internet Interruption*

As the internet was shut down for five days in Egypt, communication between people in Egypt and diasporic Egyptians through social media was interrupted. Participants were asked about how they used social media during these days. Did they help Egyptian cyberactivists to post or share up-to-date news in order to facilitate the Egyptian cyberactivists' mission? Most participants agreed that they did not log on Facebook because there was no connection or news from activists, family members, or friends in Egypt.

*I did not use the internet during the shutdown in Egypt until the government restored it back.*

By the same token,

*I did not have any role. The internet was switched off in Egypt, thus, I did not log on Facebook.*

While most respondents did not have any role during the absence of the internet, a few said that they logged on social media, particularly Facebook, and talked with their friends in Saudi Arabia, sharing new information and news for users outside Egypt:

*As a user I was not affected by the internet shutdown in Egypt. I logged on Facebook normally, talked with my friends here in Saudi Arabia and shared news with them. I talked with my family and friends in Egypt using a landline phone.*

Generally, participants did not have any role in using social media during the internet shutdown; except for their attempts to share new news about the events back in Egypt as much as they can.

### *How Egyptians used Social Media during the Presidential Elections of 2012*

The Egyptian revolution did not reach its achievements by the overthrow of the regime in February 2011. Egyptian protesters wanted freedom, justice, and free elections. When the Egyptian Presidential elections started, Egyptians confessed that they were excited to vote at the first round because it was the first free elections they had in Egypt. After the first round's results,

Egyptians responses “ranged from disappointment and rage to a frantic fear that the revolution was being hijacked” (“The Revolution Continues,” 2012, para. 7). Questions were asked to participants about their role in the 2012 elections, especially in using social media. Initially, interviewees talked about the elections and their opinions of the electoral candidates:

*I cannot judge that Amro Moussa was from the old regime. I feel that anyone like Moussa, who takes instructions from the presidency or a high authority, will do so and follow their instructions. We have a popular saying: (Give the bread to the bakers, even if they eat half of it). Today when Morsi or Shafiq get the presidency, Moussa is more efficient than them because he became aware of internal, external, and global politics. He has communications with many Arab regions that can facilitate many things for our country. I am frustrated... Morsi would be more capable in his field as an engineer more than Moussa and Shafiq. Still the elections are not transparent. There was doubt and suspicion on the elections. I hope that people will have more cultural awareness and freedom of expression after the revolution.*

At the second round of the elections, many Egyptians voted for President Morsi because they did not want the previous Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq, the other candidate, to be the President and the revolution goals would not be attained if Shafiq was elected. The same was the case with diasporic Egyptians; most interviewees acknowledged that at the first phase they were enthusiastic and optimistic to vote for their preferred candidate. Democracy was the first Egyptians’ demand during the uprising in order to live in a civil state and develop the country, as one participant clarified:

*Of course I followed the elections with all Egyptians because I want my country to be stable and settle a president to reform the country. I elected from Saudi Arabia to have a role in the elections.*

One participant demonstrated the exact situation during the elections by his own words.

Choosing between Morsi and Shafiq was a problematic, even for diasporic Egyptians. He clarified that many people decided to boycott the elections and invalidate their voices. However, he chose to vote for the least rock weight (lesser of two evils). He said:

*All the time I was biased to the idea of a civil state and I do not accept the idea of a religious state or military (I am against). I imagine that Grand Egypt is in front of a very large opportunity to offer a model for the possibility to combine democracy with Islamic values under one sky. At the first stage, I wished to have Elbaradei among candidates and I wanted to vote for him... After his withdrawal, I voted for one of the candidates of civil power. At the second stage, we had two candidates. One candidate was linked to the old regime and the other candidate belonged to ideological mixing religion with politics. It was a difficult position. Many people preferred not to vote. Many people with emotion went and invalidate their voices, and some of my children have done so. But I said that this is not considered a positive attitude because first and foremost the rock will fall over our heads. I participated in the second phase to choose the least weight of the rock, which will fall on us.*

A few respondents were not satisfied with the results of the first phase; thus, they have not given their votes to either one of the two candidates. As one said:

*I did not vote because no one convinced me in the first or second phase.*

The Egyptian people used social media networking sites during the 2012 elections (the first and second phase) to demand for transparent elections and convey their opinions. Many respondents used Facebook precisely to post information, upload pictures, and discuss with Facebook users about their preferred candidate, as one explained:

*I collected information about Sabbahi and published it on Facebook. I uploaded his pictures and articles to make people vote for him because people finally found the opportunity to vote by themselves.*

Similarly,

*I shared my comments and joined discussions about some Islamic trends, which I am inclined to them, and more inclined to Sabbahi.*

Another respondent used social media to express his rejection in voting for the two previous candidates, Morsi and Shafiq. He designed pictures that represent this notion and reflect the Egyptian's street situation, and posted them on Facebook (See Appendix E):

*I made three or four photos because I was not convinced of the two candidates in the elections. One presents a destitute lady carrying a large garbage bag full with trash and I*

*put Morsi and Shafiq's pictures. My idea was that the best choice between the two of them is bitter.*

On the other hand, a few respondents invalidated their voices and hence they did not use social media, such as Facebook, to promote for their favored candidate:

*I did not give my voice to anyone and did not use social media to talk about the presidential elections.*

Because one participant did not log onto Facebook every day, he did not share any news or thoughts about the 2012 elections:

*I did not log on Facebook every day at that time. It was normal if I did not participate. Sometimes I logged on from my phone to explore news and then I signed-out.*

A few respondents talked about giving the chance to the current President, Morsi, to prove himself and start a new page. As one interviewee expressed, she said:

*I made many discussions and always take the oppressed side. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood now has the control and I was against them. Currently, I have started to trust them. I started to share any information as much as I can about Morsi because I was against Shafiq. At the beginning, I was not confident in Morsi. I discussed with people about the Brotherhood. Some people said they are terrorists. I began to change my opinion and said that it is possible that they have good things, so I started to trust them and said it is possible to give them a chance because we did not see anything from them until now. I love to be with the oppressed side or the side which did not take their right until now.*

## **The Rise of Social Media Platform Use**

Most respondent had Facebook accounts before the revolution. They used Facebook to communicate with their families, friends, and colleagues around the globe. Overall, many respondents indicated that they had Facebook accounts prior to the revolution; however, they started to pay attention to Facebook as a source of political information after January 25.

*For Facebook, my use of Facebook represents 90 or 95 percent of social networking sites. I did not like any political pages before January 25 and I did not know any information about them. On January 25, I began to communicate and learn about the Facebook movement by logging on "January 25 movement" or any other pages talking about January 25. I entered the page to read without liking it because I felt that these pages*

*were monitored and controlled by the security of the State in Egypt. I was afraid to share or make comments. It was very difficult politically and culturally for us to comment, write and declare freely without fearing from of the security of the State. After January 25, the situation changed and people became subscribers significantly so there were more than 625,000 subscribers in one page. I felt that the issue had become normal and we became among normal people. After Mubarak's resignation, and after I confirmed that pages were 100 percent not monitored, I liked "Shabab 25 January".*

A couple respondents revealed that they thought at early stages that this was a joke.

However, after January 25, they started to follow up what happened through Facebook because it was an initial platform to organize and call for protests by cyberactivists.

*Firstly, my source of information was from Facebook because cyberactivists called for the revolution through Facebook. At the beginning I thought it was a joke and I did not pay any attention to it. When January 25 came and thousands of people went to Tahrir Square, I started to follow Facebook groups. Also, I watched TV channels, for instance, Al-Jazeera news channel, Al-Arabiya, the French channel, and CBN.*

Also,

*I have colleagues in Egypt and we talked normally about what was happening in Egypt through Facebook. At the beginning, we had uncertain information and of course many jokes about the former regime were presented at that time. When the revolution started, I started to read electronic media, such as Al-Youm Al-Sabea on Facebook.*

Another subject said that he joined Facebook after the Tunisian revolution, as he said.

*What grabbed my attention to Facebook was the AbuAzizi's revolution (what happened in Tunisia). I followed up what happened through pictures and videos. That was my main reason to join Facebook.*

In contrast, one participant explained that he followed "We are all Khalid Said" Facebook group page before the revolution:

*Before the revolution my source was "We are all Khalid Said" and "Al-Baradei" Facebook pages.*

### **Social Media, Credibility, and Validating Political News**

Because all respondents used Facebook more than any other social media platform, participants were asked about the credibility of information in Facebook. Interviewees were



between supporters and opponents. In fact, several of them agreed that Facebook contained exaggerated information because most people who shared news were not professionals.

*We can say sometimes the news can be little bit over. Sometimes people exaggerate things. For example, sometimes I see something on TV and then I read the opposite story or event on Facebook. Do you know why? Because they are not professionals or journalists so they can convey the real events. When I hate someone and he looks at me, I will feel that it is a hatred look (because I do not know him). They are humans like us. I know those people and I know their position from a certain person... sometimes that person does something normal but people exaggerate the incident and make it a big issue. I know that they are making things bigger than it should be. On the other hand, many activists posted true pictures and stories about what was going on and how many people were there, and documented their stories with live videos.*

Another respondent said that Facebook and Twitter reflect personal point of views:

*I logged on Facebook and Twitter, but I concentrated on TV and information from my family in Egypt because I do not trust the credibility of the internet...Facebook and Twitter platforms are a personal point of view...people can fabricate and use Photoshop to edit pictures.*

Likewise, one interviewee indicated that he logged on Facebook to read youth's opinion not new news. He said:

*I liked to watch political analysis on TV during the events. On Facebook, on the other hand, I liked to see people's opinions and expectations, whether they were elderly or youth. I often was inclined with which was happening.*

The way the information was shared or commented by the first person can affect others, as one respondent indicated:

*Very true that Facebook shares dramatized and distorted news. Sometimes the event or picture is usual, but the first person who made the comment, provoked others.*

One respondent gave an example about how Facebook news or pictures can mislead people. He said,

*Yes, pictures might be fabricated... Some people post old pictures from another revolution in another country. I do not remember the date, but after the situation had reached the point that little stability was in the country, an old picture was uploaded on Facebook and alleged that this was a new operation in Tahrir Square. I saw many pictures for Tahrir on Facebook and we noticed that they were fabricated.*

Another example was given about how pictures can be fabricated on Facebook using the Photoshop program.

*Some people uploaded an old picture (three or four years old), posted it on Facebook, and wrote Egypt now. There were people who discovered the truth and explained it. Those people clarified to others that the picture had been fabricated using Photoshop.*

Regardless that Facebook exaggerates news, a few said that Facebook provides true news.

*Some people exaggerated news, but the majority provided true news...I compared Facebook pages with other electronic newspapers, such as "AL-Akhbar" and "Al-Ahram", and felt that there was exaggeration.*

Moreover,

*All information is subject to criticism and review...But 95 percent I feel like it is okay.*

Therefore, most participants agreed that information from Facebook must be validated before believing or acting on it. This was made by comparing information from Facebook with other sources, such as family, friends, or TV channels. If the information appeared more than once, then that meant that it was correct.

*The credibility on Facebook and Twitter are so low. If you find any new information on Facebook or Twitter, you need to make sure about its credibility not just take it as it is. It might be exaggerated news; thus, I must validate it from trustworthy sources because people who write on Facebook are not accountable for what they write. Sometimes they are all lies. Each one writes what he/she wants from news and publishes them on Facebook. I only read just for curiosity and I do not share information until I validate its authenticity. I must make sure from the beginning and then I publish the information.*

One respondent asserted that information can be authenticated by friends in Egypt. He said:

*For example, we found on a certain page that one person said that he is in Tahrir Square and there is a martyr. We took his information and tried to make sure it was correct from friends and TV. Also, we can know if the information was credible or not if it appeared on more than one page or through the phone with my friends in Egypt.*

Another respondent concurred that information or news can be validated by TV or friends and family in Egypt.

I used the internet, but watched TV more than the internet because it is possible to find that the internet has news or information that may be contrary to reality and contrary to the true picture. So I used the phone to call my family and friends in Egypt and TV more than the internet to know information.

Additionally,

*Facebook contained exaggeration, but when more than one page or person conveys the same information, we can say it is true and understand the proper picture.*

Another participant affirmed that information provided on the internet needs to have at least one source in order to acknowledge it.

*There were credible groups and others who gave malicious rumors to spark strife; thus, we need to explore the facts first. I take into account any news with a source, however, I did not believe news without any source. Sources can be from any newspaper, media professional, journalist, or celebrity.*

Likewise,

*It is possible that there certain information can be false from beginning to end, but we should search more than one source.*

Many Egyptian celebrities were with the previous administration at that time, and they had an efficient role in demanding that people stand up with the government and Mubarak. Many

Egyptians were against them and did not like their point of view, as one respondent expressed.

Thus, to confirm her information, she trusted her father.

*Yes, of course. Facebook could have misleading opinions, especially, those of the artists, who were with the previous regime. In fact, during the uprising, I trusted my father and his source of information.*

## **Social Media and Freedom of Expression**

Throughout the interview discourses, a few talked about the freedom of speech in social media after the revolution. Specifically, after the demonstrations were held and people took to the streets demanding liberty and reform, as one said:

*Can you imagine the terrible reality of difference between before and after the revolution? No one can feel it, except who were living it. Difference in opinion and*

*freedom that you do not feel that someone is chasing you...and you cannot express your opinion on corruption or about public opinion not private opinion with respect to the country. To know why there was corruption in our country...Why and how were not in use.*

Although diasporic Egyptians were abroad during the Egyptian turbulent, social media platforms gave them the capability to express their opinions and embrace all Egyptians in one place, so Egyptians abroad felt that they were *in the heart of the event*, as one responded expressed:

*From a long time Egyptian people have lived in the silence and suddenly they have changed mentally... this was a surprise for all. I was participating and commenting with great pleasure. I cannot remember all what was written, but I felt I was living with the revolution. I felt I was in the heart of the event because I can see all opinions, for example, people who were in favor of the old regime and people who supported the revolution and so on.*

One respondent was hesitant to express his opinion on Facebook; however, only after January 28 when the demonstrations started, was he more encouraged leaving comments on Facebook. Furthermore, he shared some videos, which he considered the most horrific ones on his page to make sure that all his friends could see them:

*I posted comments once or twice after February 11 (the step down Day). But before this day, I just browsed and did not venture to write my name or my identity clearly. After January 28, when there was no police on streets, I wrote some comments, such as take care of your selves, and keep your revolution. I watched YouTube videos, especially heinous scenes. The toughest scene was Al-Qasr Al-Aini Street accident. I chose 3 or 4 of the most horrific scenes and shared them on my page, so my friends and those who had not seen these videos can see them and be affected. That of course was after January 28 because the risk was on January 28 and before.*

On the other hand, one participant argued that sharing opinions and views in general might lead to many problems. He confessed that he did not participate (shared news or commented) on Facebook or any other social media platforms because he did not want to face any difficulties since he is living outside his country. He said:

*No, I did not write I just read... I argued only by phone because we are foreigners. We need to abide by the laws here. We only need to know where our country is going and what the true picture is. Moreover, I only read to know the latest news and*

*developments...My upbringing, education and principles did not allow me to enter like these kind of discussions. My purpose was to check on my family and country. It would have been possible to join and comment if I am in Egypt. But I am outside Egypt and I was afraid to comment.*

Mostly, interviewed Egyptians had their own perspectives about the 2011 Egyptian uprising. Most of them used social media platforms, such as Facebook, as means of communication to exemplify their views and beliefs as well as a primary source of their political news.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this section is to interpret and explain the importance of the findings based on the interview analysis. By applying the grounded theory, relations between interview answers were generated from participant answers in order to find the key results. Results from this study then were compared with other studies in order to promote or refute the claims. The findings are organized based on distinctive features.

As social media was one of the factors that helped activists seeking for political reforms to obtain a successful revolutionary movement in Egypt 2011, many studies focused on cyberactivists in Egypt and their role in instigating demonstrations and overthrowing the regime using social media platforms. Egyptians in the diaspora, on the other hand, shared the same hopes with activists in their homeland about reform and change. Those diasporic communities, who are part of their homeland, are not fully understood into what extent they interacted with social media during the 2011 turbulent events in Egypt. Thus, the study attempts to investigate the Egyptian diaspora's contributions in the Egyptian revolution and to what degree new technology, social media, was used. Along the same lines, this research helps to understand how Egyptians in Saudi Arabia perceive the use of social media as a means of communication.

As revealed by interviews, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia had prominent insights through the exposure to a real experience, which helped to understand how the Egyptian diasporic community engaged their media during the 2011 revolution. While TV news channels, talk show programs, phone, and other electronic news are irreplaceable sources, the progressive means of communication gave the diasporic Egyptians the opportunity to engage and incorporate themselves into social media landscapes, in particular Facebook, in order to primarily gather new information, communicate with relatives and friends, and take a role in demanding the freedom

of their country. Although that role was insignificant compared with cyberactivists' role in Egypt, diasporic Egyptians believe that social media emerges as an alternative space for them to provide support for their homeland and shape their opinions.

### **Egyptian Diaspora, Political Information, and Extent of Social Media Use During the Uprising**

Generally, with the case of diasporic Egyptians in Saudi Arabia, social media was used substantially during the Egyptian revolution. This result contradicts what Keller (2010) discusses about the use of social media by the diasporic Iranian community and how it was insignificant in the Iranian revolution. Further, Morozov (2011) perceives that social media platforms are used for entertaining daily use instead of sharing political information and organizing protests. By the same token, Gladwell (2011) argues that social media creates weak ties and it is an improper tool for political movements. Conversely, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia had the opposite opinion. Many interviewees said they used social media to get fast and accurate political news about the Egyptian events. In addition to the use of cyberspace to communicate with friends and families, social media was used to diffuse and extract new political information during the revolution. This approach confirms what Meikle (2002) and Shirky (2011) say about using the internet as an influential tool for political reforms.

From the discourse contexts, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia talked about their sources of political information during the civil movements in Egypt. Social media, namely Facebook, appears to be the highest source and local media sponsored by the government (public sector channels) was the least one for their political news. Not only was social media was the source for Egyptians in Saudi Arabia, but also independent local media (private sector channel), such as Al-Yom Al-Sabea electronic news and Al-Hayat TV; regional media, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-

Arabiya; and international media, such as journalism.com, were other sources after social media platforms. In the same way, the results confirm a survey done among Egyptian Facebook users by the *Arab Social Media Report* (Dubai School of Government, 2011b). The survey shows that 94 percent said that they used social media networking sites as their political sources during the political movement, 85 percent said they followed independent media in Egypt, including TV, newspapers, radio, and e-news as Al-Youm Al-Sabea, 48 percent followed regional or international media, while 40 percent followed the government-sponsored media. This shows that Egyptians highly relied on social media as a source for their news and information. While more than half of them did not depend on government-sponsored media, approximately half of them relied on regional or international media, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.

### **Egyptian Diaspora and Preferred Social Media Platform**

All participants agreed on watching YouTube videos during the Egyptian movement, as Alexa (n.d.) shows that YouTube website takes the third place among the most visited electronic sites in Egypt. Moreover, it was clear from the interviews that there is very high reliance by most participants during the revolution on Facebook more than any other social media platforms, such as Twitter. One participant described Facebook as his “original home.” A few respondents followed Twitter for more political information. This study confirms a previous survey that was done on university students in Egypt after the revolution. Results show that most of surveyed students browsed the internet and social media, in particular Facebook, to find new information. In fact, the use of Twitter was much less since fewer than half of them followed Twitter during the Egyptian uprising (Kavanaugh et al., 2012).

Between Twitter and Facebook, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia used Facebook more than Twitter to get and share news and information. In spite that a few interviewees confirmed that



they have Twitter accounts, most of them were inactive users. With this in mind, in the Middle East, Twitter users were estimated 200 million in March 2011. However, only 30-40 million of them are “active” and tweet new news (Dubai School of Government, 2011b). This shows that Twitter users mainly receive and read tweets more than tweeting. Moreover, the number of active Twitter users is insignificant compared to Facebook users, lower than the total number of Egyptian Facebook users alone (Dubai School of Government, 2011b) confirming the interview results.

Also, on Facebook, prior to the revolution, “The April 6 Youth Movement” Facebook group page and other pages, which demanded for social changes encouraged people, notably Egyptians in the diaspora, to follow up these political changes. More importantly, when Khalid Said’s incident happened and the “We are all Khalid Said” group page emerged on Facebook, this page was an opportunity for Egyptians in Saudi Arabia to get new political news, interact with revolutionaries in Egypt, and sympathize with them. This conclusion supports Chebib and Sohail (2011) when they talk about the features of social media that attracted Egyptian protestors during the 2011 revolution. Scholars indicate that Facebook encompasses personal, group, event, and community pages, which facilitate sharing information. For example, when Ghonaim started the group “We are all Khalid Said,” thousands of people followed this page.

#### *Electronic News*

Most interviewees followed the Egyptian political news through Al-Youm Al-Sabea electronic site or the Facebook page during the revolution. This confirms what Alexa (n.d.), the web information company, shows about visiting Al-Youm Al-Saebe. The company places the top 500 sites in Egypt based on the information flow of users. Al-Youm Al-Sabea website has a high penetration rate among the internet users, which is the seventh place. Moreover, Al-Youm

Al-Sabea was ranked the first place for the most influential Arab press on the internet for the second consecutive year in November 2011, according to *Forbes Middle East Magazine* (Al-Abbasi, 2011). Then, Masrawy, Al-Ahram, and Al-Masry Al-Youm electronic news comes between the tenth and twenties ranks, after Al-Youm Al-Sabea (Alexa, n.d.). Along the same lines, these electronic sites were highly visited by a few interviewees, as they said, also after Al-Youm Al-Sabea. For international media, a couple said that they followed international media, such as the French channel, the American, British, and Israeli press.

Many respondents agreed that they got fast and accurate news through Facebook from their families, friends, and activists in Egypt. Several accessed TV news channels, talk show program, and media professional Facebook pages for more political information.

### **Egyptian Diaspora, Communication Modes, and Social Media Use During Uprising**

Almost all interviewees used phone to communicate with families and friends in homeland, whereas several used Facebook and Skype for their communications. From previous Egyptian revolutions, such as the revolution of 1919 and 1952, protestors used old-fashioned communications to prepare for demonstrations, for example, underground meetings and leaflets. Nowadays, with the 2011 revolution, new media was not only used to organize demonstrations, but also to convey Egyptians' voices and share them with their diasporic communities around the world. Bennett (2011) points that social networking sites played a substantial role in facilitating communication between cyberactivists and diasporas.

In the Middle East, family and friend ties are strong and they tend to communicate regularly in person, through phone, or the internet (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Egyptians in the diaspora are connected with their families and friends in Egypt and always in constant contact. Thus, during the Egyptian revolution, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia had concerns about their

families, friends, and activists. Social networking sites along with phones allowed them to be reassured that people in Egypt were safe. Similar to the example of Indians living in London (Goswami, 2010), Egyptians in Saudi Arabia constructed a new home for themselves through audiovisual media, such as social media, in order to stay connected with their relatives and friends in Egypt, namely, during the revolution. This new public conversation allowed diasporic communities to construct their identities and show their collaboration and affiliation to their groups (Bernal, 2006). Another substantial characteristic for using the new technology with the Zapatista was they were able to communicate, exchange information, and experience with many organized groups around the world through cyberspace (Martinez-Torres, 2001). This phenomenon also allowed Egyptians in Saudi Arabia to communicate with protesters in Egypt and create a new space to discuss information and political news with protesters, families, and friends in Egypt.

During the internet outage, more than half of surveyed people in Egypt said that this incident motivated them to find other ways to communicate (Dubai School of Government, 2011b). Along the same lines, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia found different means in order to communicate with people in Egypt. Many of them used landline phone to communicate with their relatives and friends because cell phones were interrupted, while the rest of them did not have the chance to communicate during the internet shutdown. One admitted that a friend, who works in a telecom company, helped him to reach his family.

### **Egyptian Diaspora, Social Media, and Age**

Considering the fact that most interviewees used Facebook more than Twitter during the Egyptian political events, this research supports what previous studies have shown that older people are shifting to Facebook more than Twitter equally to Egyptian participants who used

Facebook more than Twitter during the revolution. In fact, the average age of interviewees was 40.73, while the mode (the most frequent age) was 45. A recent study in the United States also shows that Facebook users are getting older and Twitter users are getting younger. The average age of Facebook users is 40.5 years old and the average age of Twitter users is 37.3 years old. The age average of Facebook users jumped more than 2 years compared to an earlier study 2.5 years ago, whereas in Twitter, the average age went down 2 years. What is more, 55 percent of Twitter users are more than 35 years old, while 65 percent are Facebook users are more than 35 year old (Pingdom, 2012). In other words, “The number of Facebook users who are over 30 years of age has risen slightly, possibly due to more adults signing on to Facebook in the wake of the civil movements across the region” (Arab Social Media, 2011b, p. 23).

### **Social Media, Penetration Rate, and Preferred Language**

For online news and social media penetration rate, interviewees explored the internet, namely online news, more than social media. In fact, many of them browsed online news more than 4 hours on a daily basis, while several used social media more than 4 hours each day. This might be because many respondents agreed that they kept the news websites open most of the day to follow any news updates. In addition, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia browsed the news websites and social networking sites using laptops more than their cell phones and desktops least during the civil movements. To be sure, a couple said that they started to browse online news and social media sites from their cell phones after January 25. That access was from home and work, which indicates that Egyptians were more concerned about the political position in their homeland than any other ordinary news. Compared to Kavanaugh et al. (2012) study, scholars find that all participants used landline phone, cell phones, and/or text messages as a source of information and communication. The primary language that was used to communicate on

Facebook during the Egyptian uprising was Arabic with 75 percent, while 25 percent used English (Dubai School of Government, 2011b). Similarly, most Egyptians in Saudi Arabia preferred Arabic to communicate with users on Facebook than English, which indicates that most Egyptians write in Arabic language, in Egypt or abroad.

### **Social Media, Credibility, and Validating News**

As it was discussed with interviewees, several said that not all what is written in social media generally and Facebook specifically is correct because news and information can be exaggerated. To take a case in point, pictures can be fabricated and critical information can mislead people. Hence, most participants agreed that they tried to confirm social media news, especially from Facebook, using other sources, including TV channels, Egyptians in homeland, and e-news in order to ensure that the received information was correct. Accurate information was their main concern and that was seen when they compared any new news to multiple sources. Watching the latest news on TV and YouTube videos as well as reading electronic news, Facebook posts, and tweets in Twitter, all together form an integral unity for them in order to gather new information. This conclusion is identical with the Kavanaugh et al. (2012) study. Scholars suggest that Egyptians in Egypt tended to validate political information from more than one source during the uprising.

### **Egyptian Diaspora and their Interaction (Role) with Social Media**

Most respondents said they got involved in discussions and sharing opinions on Facebook. Writing articles, uploading new pictures and videos, and sharing new credible information were examples of how Egyptians in Saudi Arabia participated in social media. One wrote poems about the situation and his dream of having a free country. Another example was embracing Khalid

Said's incident with cyberactivists in Egypt as a tool in order to take the chance for social changes.

By the same token, Egyptian Americans used social media to “share the information they gathered directly from their friends and relatives in Egypt” (Kuşcu, 2012, p.130). Diasporic Egyptians wanted to be celebrated similar to activists in Egypt, who participated in the civil movement and became popular around the world. The Greek example is particularly interesting when considered with respect to expatriate Egyptians because the Greek's turmoil is different, but the use of social media is working to “create teams that will contribute, assist and support the country to rise above these difficult times” (Syrigos, 2011, para. 9), which is reasonably similar.

Using social media during the US presidential elections in 2012 was extraordinarily successful in order to achieve the campaign goals and gain more votes. Generally, during the Egyptian presidential polls, many Egyptians in Saudi Arabia used social media platforms to make people vote for their preferred candidate. In fact, they started to find new methods to be engaged in Egypt's future (Kuşcu, 2012). So too, from interviews, many participants used social media to share information and news, discuss opinions, and upload pictures about their favored candidate. For instance, one participant designed pictures about the electors and Egypt's future (See Appendix E).

Social media sites gave diasporas the capability to attract global support and to play mediators in delivering new news in other languages, English for example, between protestors in their native country and people where they live (Bennett, 2011). Although a few interviewed Egyptians acknowledged that social media was a significant platform to them in demonstrating and answering all addressed questions from Saudi friends and other friends in other countries, such as Syria, Palestine, and other foreign countries, it appears that diasporic communities are

more focused on how they connect back to the homeland than thinking about themselves as a way to generate ties to between their native country and the global community. Many people, including journalists, utilized political news from social media in order to update and deploy news (Chebib & Sohail, 2011). This happened with a couple respondents; one took information from Facebook in order to write articles, while another took the news and published it into a large news website, of which he is a chief editor. When the internet was shut down, Egyptians in the diaspora helped cyberactivists to diffuse new news and messages through social media sites, such as Twitter (Dunn, 2011). However, respondents did not report any kind of participation in this sphere. The only role that was done by a few respondents was to share new information to people outside Egypt, including Saudi friends.

### **Reasons for Choosing Social Media as the Primary Platform**

Many reasons drove Egyptians in Saudi Arabia to use social media as their primary platform during the revolution. In Saudi Arabia, protests are banned by the government. While small demonstrations rarely happened, the police repressed protesters from these assemblies. Egyptians in the United States, for example, organized demonstrations as a symbol to show their affiliation and support to their country and the Egyptian activists. However, this situation cannot occur in Saudi Arabia and so Egyptians could not plan any protests against their government in front of their embassy, for instance. Thus, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia were able to translate their absence of the Tahrir Square's demonstrations by intensifying all their efforts into social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Moreover, because Egyptians in Saudi Arabia were unable to be with activists in Tahrir Square, they tried to participate in social media in order to compensate the lack of being absent.

Given this point, Egyptian Americans had the same feelings of being left out during the social movement in their homeland:

The revolution exacerbated pre-existing insecurities over the authenticity of the community's Egyptian identity. Many Egyptian-Americans who could not physically participate in Tahrir Square cannot help but feel a sense that their 'Egyptianness' is now somehow lacking. As Dalia Mogahed of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies observes, 'I don't know any Egyptians outside Egypt who didn't feel an incredible sense that they were left out, that they had missed out, almost like a sense of loss.' (Stern, 2011, para. 4)

### **Egyptian Diaspora, Arab Media, and Censorship**

For a long time TV channels, newspapers, and other forms of media in the Arab region were controlled by the autocratic ruling regimes. Arab media was mainly censored with limited internet access in order to prevent people's voices from being heard and hence to make sure that they would not be united in any political participation (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). Local Egyptian media, especially the governmental one, was muzzled and did not report the uprising events as social media did (Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011). Interviewees asserted that social media, in particular Facebook, enabled them to know up-to-date information about cyberactivists in Tahrir Square and transferred new news, pictures, and videos dynamically, which local media could not report at that time. This end also confirms when Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian (2011) prove that YouTube videos were more powerful than local media in watching and reaching public sphere. The Zapatista movement in the Mexican state of Chiapas, 1994, was a significant example of using new technology, the internet, in organizing anti-globalization movements. The internet enabled international media to report what local reporters could not say. Information was spread all over the world, in particular among diasporic Mexicans (Martinez-Torres, 2001).



Making analogy to local media in Egypt, the Egyptian community in Saudi Arabia was aware and rarely relied on their local media whether on Egyptian government TV channels or electronic news, as one participant said he watched local Egyptian media to follow what they have missed. The only electronic media or channels that were highly followed were Al-Youm Al-Sabea e-news and other independent Egyptian channels.

As discussed previously, literature confirms that social media had a key role in the Egyptian revolution as well as was the platform for spreading new political information among people around the world in particular with the diasporic communities. While that was approved, older media, markedly Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya had the same effort during the revolution and overcome media censorship. Egyptians in Saudi Arabia agreed that Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya had an extraordinary role in reporting news about the 2011 uprising. This confirms what Lynch (2011) says about new media--social media-- and older media--satellite TV such as Al-Jazeera-- and the information flow in carrying the political information in Egypt. In fact, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya were accurate sources for the Egyptian community in Saudi Arabia during the Egyptian revolution.

#### *Internet Shutdown and Censorship*

The internet and cell phone blackout in Egypt is a manifest example that embodies censorship in some Arab authoritarianism regimes (Lynch, 2011). The significant purpose for the internet shutdown was an attempt from the government to dismantle assemblies among activists in Tahrir Square and isolate them from the outside world. Egyptians in Saudi Arabia were inhibited from knowing up-to-date information about the political situation of their country. Hence, most of them relied on TV channels, several asked relatives and friends in their homeland about new news, while few followed electronic news, such as Al-Youm Al-Sabea and Rassd.

## **Social Media and Freedom of Speech**

A few respondents recognized that with social media platforms, Egyptian people are freer and are using those freedoms to shape their opinions more than before. A couple were hesitant to participate in social media before January 25, however, after that they started to participate in Facebook. Only one respondent did not comment or share information in social media. In a like manner, Lynch (2011) endorses that with the “new powers of the internet” (p. 304) and its evolution, authoritarian regimes are encountering new political challenges with their citizens. He questions whether the autocratic regimes could accept the notion of using the public sphere for political reforms and the continuity scope to control it. This also supports Ghannam’s (2011) opinion about the social media and freedom of expression.

Just as Arab Satellite channels helped revolutionize broadcast news, social media is arguably changing the nature of news and community engagement, which continues to evolve with increased convergence of social media and satellite broadcasts, as seen in Tunisia, Egypt, and other countries of the region. (p.23)

New media has enabled Egyptians around the world to express their opinions, which they could not do before.

Overall, social media platforms were used extensively by interviewees when protests started to take place into the Egyptian streets, continuing through the 2012 Egyptian elections, and even after the revolution, when Egyptians in Saudi Arabia still anxious and have concerns about the future of their homeland.

## **Limitations**

This research study entailed a few limitations. First, I translated the interviews from the Arabic to the English language. I am not qualified as a translator and might have missed out the

exact meaning of certain words. However, all efforts were made to translate the interview transcripts correctly. Second, although I encouraged interviewees to speak freely without any restrictions, a limitation in the study might occur: respondents might not express their honest thoughts while reporting their answers. This prospect cannot be overlooked as a potential risk in doing qualitative research. Third, regardless of the advantages that came from sharing similar cultural backgrounds with interviewees, I might have not taken into account some facts that were obvious to me, which can be considered important to others. Finally, the findings in this research study may not represent the perception of other diasporic communities on how they used social media platforms during political movements.

### **Recommendations**

In this study, further research can be done in order to serve the Egyptian diasporic communities around the world and their use of social media, both in quantitative and qualitative studies. Firstly, additional research is needed through comparing Egyptians in their homeland and in the diaspora on how they engaged social media during the revolution. Secondly, as this study focused on a dedicated time, a time-series analysis can be conducted on the Egyptian diasporic communities to compare before and after the significant evolution in freedom of expression in the Arab region. Thirdly, a future study can be done on each social media platform as a medium of communication for the Egyptians in the diaspora and compare them to each other. Fourthly, a further study can be conducted to compare youth and older Egyptians in the diaspora and their use of social media during the revolution. Lastly, since the Arab region and West region have different restrictions in freedom of expression, a comparative study could be done between the role of the Egyptian communities in the Arab region and the West region and their engagements during the revolution.

## Conclusion

This thesis explored the role of Egyptians in Saudi Arabia during the 2011 Egyptian revolution in using social media platforms. Many Egyptians had to leave the country for economic reasons and lack of employment. Hence, when the turbulence started to take place, Egyptian communities around the world felt that they were an integral part of Egyptians in their native country, pledged with grass roots activists, and wished to be there to participate with them. In spite of other means of attempts and interactions by Egyptian diaspora, such as rallies, social media platforms offered an opportunity for Egyptian diasporic communities to engage themselves in this historical event.

A total of 17 Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia were interviewed, who used social media during the Egyptian events. Results indicate that nearly all participants perceive that social media platforms can be used to find new political information about the recent events in Egypt. Social media platforms along with TV channel, such as Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, and talk show programs, as well as Al-Youm Al-Sabea website were other political sources that attracted many Egyptians in Saudi Arabia to collect new news. In fact, older media, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, is still keeping up the pace as important sources with the new technology, social media. However, local Arab media is still censored and this was manifest when most participants refused to follow local Egyptian media because it was regulated by the government. Moreover, validating new information is another important factor that was derived from research findings. Many participants agreed that they tend to validate political news from more than one source before believing it.

Because TV news and talk show programs rarely allow people to participate, social media facilitates communication methods between diasporic Egyptians and Egyptians in their

homeland. Egyptians have strong ties with their families and friends in their native country. Nearly all used phone service to communicate with their families, friends, and activists in Egypt to make sure they were safe during the uprising. For more communication ties, several used social media websites to connect directly with people in Egypt. What is more, the primary reason that social media was the most powerful instrument for Egyptians in Saudi Arabia was to compensate the lack of not being in Egypt during demonstrations as well as the fact that protests cannot be held in Saudi Arabia. Thus, social media was the window for diasporic community in Saudi Arabia to prove their affiliation to their homeland albeit through their voices only. The public sphere was used to convey their voices to Egypt and around the world.

For social media platforms, it was diagnosed that all participants watched YouTube videos whether from Facebook or directly on the website. Almost all accessed Facebook platforms, while a few were active on Twitter. The “We are all Khalid Said” Facebook group page was the most preferred page for Egyptians in Saudi Arabia by most participants, whereas a few did not pay attention to the page names. The preferable language to communicate was Arabic. Most had a role in sharing new information from other resources about the political events, such as through other social media platforms, electronic news, international media, activists, friends or families in Egypt. Other examples were uploading new pictures and videos, engaging into discussions, and trying to answer questions from people outside Egypt. These efforts proved to be insignificant compared to their most concern, which to be sure that all Egyptians and the country are safe.

The role played by Egyptians in Saudi Arabia during the revolution seems to be, to some extent, different than cyberactivists in Egypt. Many variables have contributed to construct the role of Egyptians in Saudi Arabia during the turbulent events through their use of social media.

While protests cannot be held in Saudi Arabia, Egyptians in Saudi Arabia had concerns about their participation with Egyptian cyberactivists. Thus, social media platforms shaped a new lane for them to participate in the Egyptian events and deliver their voices to the whole world with very high reliance. Moreover, many Egyptians were apprehensive to participate in toppling the regime, specifically before January 25, because their participation might threaten them and be viewed by the Egyptian Government. Another variable was their distance from home, which meant that they had more at stake in trying to find out about family, friends, and activists, and in part because of the issues related to news and information credibility during a revolution. Thus, Egyptians in the diaspora utilized social media platforms to assemble and mobilize news and political information during the revolution, challenging information among other networks of people. Results suggests that diasporic communities around the world are reshaping the way news and information is consumed during the revolutions in the Middle East, which is an important effect of social media that must be taken into account.

This study highlights the significant social media use of a specific diaspora in the Middle East. It offers a new insight on how diasporic communities see social media as a communication means, in particular during political events. With the presence of social media platforms, the Arab region now has an influential tool in which it can employ freedom of expression. This research broadens the narrow perception that diasporic communities solely use social media platforms for ordinary communication and corroborates that social media can be harnessed for radical political purposes. To put it in another way, social media is much more powerful tool than is often thought. Through social media people not only keep in contact with each other but they also share ideas and help these ideas to spread. Since social media facilitates the free and open exchange of ideas it can promote change. Moreover, social media allows those living in

diaspora to take part in the happenings of their homeland as more than observers. Social media can form and maintain strong bonds, especially concerning diaspora and politics at home.

Ultimately, this work confirms the findings of other researchers discussed herein about the empowerment of social media platforms in freedom of expression and political reform.

While it is well known that Arabs are close with their family and friends both at home and abroad, this work illustrates the many ways in which this group keeps in touch with each other. Moreover, it illustrates how Arabs embrace new and innovative technologies, the public sphere, and this is especially true when it comes to technologies which gave them new, immediate, and accurate news. As such, a greater number of Arabs through social media can join the discussion to promote change, especially political change. Moreover, this work contributes to the Arab sphere because it illustrates how Middle Eastern living in the diaspora, especially Egyptians are tied to their homeland and when living outside of Egypt's borders still consider themselves Egyptian first. In fact the Egyptian diaspora is unique for several reasons. Firstly, this group while residing outside of Egypt often lives in a nation near Egypt, such as Saudi Arabia. They form communities which, while are distinctly Egyptian also work within the greater Arabic culture. Moreover, many Egyptians in diaspora who continue to live in the region live in Arabic nations which have managed to combine technology with Arabic culture successfully.

This research adds to the field on social media in several manners. Firstly, this research utilizes a specific group of people and how they used social media during historical events; while other research on this subject exists, this research serves to complement other research on similar topics. Moreover, the results from the study illustrate that at times there are exceptions to generalizations; one example of this comes from one researcher who found that social media is not used to form strong political ties and as such is mainly just used for social interactions. In

this work, as well as others, this proves to not be the case with Egyptians who use social media to gain access to news, to spread ideas, and to garner support for change. In fact, it seems that Egyptians relied heavily on social media and did break the ties once the revolution was finished.

While older media, such as TV, opened the scope among the Arab horizon, in particular the political events, this research is sought to add and confirm that the internet activism increased the freedom of speech and exceeded the limitation of Arab local media censorship. In this case, Egyptians utilized social media as a communications medium, a news medium, a news confirmation medium, to spread the word about what was happening in their home country, and finally, as a means to show solidarity with Egyptians in Egypt which helped them to be part of what was going on.

This work used a framework based upon the work of others. Several researchers have contributed to the field of media use, specifically social media use and these researchers were discussed in this work. It is through the work of these researchers that an understanding of what is already known concerning social media, its uses and how Egyptians in particular are thought to have used was gained. While there are many gaps in what is currently known concerning social media and political ties, the current research helps to give a starting point. Moreover, while there are several studies concerning the use of social media, some of the studies are either contradictory or inconclusive. Thus, illustrating that while contributions have been made, the body of knowledge must continue to grow.



## Appendix A - Structured Interview Questions in English

Randomly Generated Number \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ (Over 18 years old)

Gender/Sex \_\_\_\_\_

### 1-During the Egyptian uprising, what was your source for political information?

For example: TV channels, the internet (news websites or any other websites), from family and friends by: landline phone, cell phone, social media (Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc.)

### 2-What types of communication media style were used with relatives and friends in Egypt during the revolution?

For example: landline phone, cell phone, the internet (e.g., Skype, Yahoo messenger, MSN), and social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, etc.

### 3-How many hours per day did you use the internet during the uprising?

For example: less than 2 hours

Between 2 -4 hours

More than 4 hours

### 4-From where did you log in for the internet?

For example: personal computer, laptop, cell phone, iPad... etc.

Also, log in can be from home, work, coffee shop, and/or friend house.

### 5-What were the most popular visited websites?

Examples: news websites, blog pages...etc.

### 6-How many hours did you use social media during the revolution?

Less than 2 hours

Between 2 -4 hours

More than 4 hours

### 7-What were the most popular social media sites that you used during the uprising?

For example, twitter, blog page, Facebook, YouTube videos... etc.

### 8-Can you talk about your participation during the uprising using social media? Can you give examples?

Examples:

-View up to date information about the revolution.

-Discuss and share opinion.

-Support people in Egypt: post tweets, join Facebook pages, and/or write in blogs.

### 9-What language did you use?

Examples: Arabic, English, and/or Franco Arab (Arabic in English letters).

### 10-During the internet shutdown in Egypt, how did you communicate with friends and relatives in Egypt?

For example:

-Landline phone, cell phones, and text messages.

- The internet, some of them used satellite internet.
- Through social media.
- Could not communicate.

**11-What was your source of political information during the absence of the internet in Egypt? Could you explain please?**

Examples: No source, TV channels, phone, cell phone, text messages, and/or the internet.

**12-Can you talk about your participation during the internet shutdown using social media?**

Answers could be:

No role.

Explain what was happening to Egyptian people in Saudi Arabia.

Help relatives and/or friends in Egypt to post tweets, YouTube videos, and/or write blogs.

Use the internet to support people in Egypt.

**13-During the presidential elections, can you explain your participation through social media platforms in the first and second phases.**

## Appendix B - Structured Interview Questions in Arabic

### أسئلة المقابلة الشخصية

الرقم العشوائي \_\_\_\_\_

العمر \_\_\_\_\_ (فوق 18 سنة)

الجنس \_\_\_\_\_

1- خلال أيام الثورة المصرية، ما هي مصادر المعلومات السياسية التي تلقيتها عن أحداث الثورة المصرية؟  
على سبيل المثال: قنوات التلفزيون، والإنترنت (المواقع الإخبارية أو أي مواقع أخرى)، من العائلة والأصدقاء من الهاتف الثابت، والهاتف الخليوي، وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية (تويتر، الفيسبوك، بلوق، ... الخ)

2- ما هي وسائل الاتصال التي استخدمتها للتواصل مع الأهل والأصدقاء خلال أحداث الثورة؟  
، على سبيل المثال: الهاتف الثابت، الهاتف الخليوي، الإنترنت (على سبيل المثال، سكايب)، وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية، مثل تويتر، الفيسبوك ... الخ.

3- كم ساعة في اليوم استخدمت الإنترنت خلال أيام الثورة؟  
على سبيل المثال: أقل من 2 ساعة - ما بين 2 ساعة - 4 - أكثر من 4 ساعات

4- من أين تم تسجيل دخولك للإنترنت؟  
على سبيل المثال: أجهزة الكمبيوتر الشخصية، وكمبيوتر محمول، والهاتف الخليوي، وتطلب الشركة ... الخ.  
أيضا، يمكن أن يكون الدخول من العمل في المنزل، كوفي شوب / و، أو منزل صديق.

5- ما هي المواقع الأكثر ترددا عليها والتي قمت بزيارتها خلال الثورة؟  
الأمثلة على ذلك: المواقع الإخبارية، وصفحات بلوق ... الخ.

6- كم ساعة استخدمت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي خلال الثورة؟  
أقل من 2 ساعة - ما بين 2 ساعة - 4 - أكثر من 4 ساعات

7- ما هي مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي التي قمت بزيارتها خلال الثورة؟  
على سبيل المثال، تويتر، صفحات بلوق، الفيسبوك، موقع اليوتيوب ... الخ.

8- هل يمكنك التحدث عن مشاركتك خلال الثورة المصرية باستخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي؟ هل يمكنك إعطاء أمثلة؟  
الأمثلة على ذلك:

عرض معلومات حديثة حول الثورة.

مناقشة وتبادل الرأي.

دعم الناس في مصر: التغريد (الكتابة في التويتر) ، الانضمام صفحات الفيسبوك، و / أو الكتابة في بلوق.

**9- ما هي اللغة التي استخدمتها للكتابة في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي؟**

الأمثلة على ذلك: العربية، الانكليزية، و / أو اللغة العربية بالحروف الإنجليزية.

**10- ما هو مصدرك للمعلومات أيام انقطاع الانترنت في مصر؟ هل يمكن أن تفسر من فضلك؟**

الأمثلة على ذلك: قنوات التلفزيون، والهاتف، والهاتف الخليوي والرسائل النصية، و / أو الإنترنت.

**11- خلال انقطاع الانترنت في مصر أيام الثورة، كيف كان يتم التواصل مع الأصدقاء والأقارب في مصر؟**

على سبيل المثال:

الهاتف الثابت، الهاتف، والهواتف الخليوية، إرسال رسائل نصية.

والإنترنت، استخدم البعض الانترنت عبر الأقمار الصناعية.

ومن خلال مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي

لم يتم التواصل

**12- هل يمكنك التحدث عن مشاركتك أيام انقطاع الانترنت باستخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي ؟**

لا يوجد دور

شرح ما يحدث للشعب المصري في المملكة العربية السعودية.

مساعدة الأقارب و / أو أصدقاء في مصر لنشر تغريدات في التويتر. إضافة فيديوهات على اليوتيوب و / أو الكتابة بلوق.

استخدام الانترنت لدعم الشعب في مصر.

**13- خلال أيام الانتخابات الرئاسية، هل يمكن أن توضح كيف كانت مشاركتك من خلال مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي في**

**المرحلتين الأولى والثانية؟**

## Appendix C - Consent Sheet in English

### Information and Consent Sheet

#### Grand Valley State University

#### School of Communications

Maisoun Al-sebaei, a Master's student in the School of Communications, is conducting a study to determine how expatriate Egyptians, specifically in Saudi Arabia, used social media during the Egyptian uprising of 2011.

I will be interviewed by Maisoun Al-sebaei. During this study, I will be asked to answer various questions. It is estimated that the interview will last between twenty to thirty minutes. I understand that my participation in this study is VOLUNTARY. I may choose to stop and withdraw from the interview at any point, for any reason. The interview will be recorded for research purposes.

The information obtained from the interview will be confidential. All recorded data will be kept in a secure location. This location will be in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the researcher. The data will always be kept in this cabinet when it is not in use for research, as well as, upon completion of the study. Personal information, including names and identities, will not be used in this study. The researcher will use randomly generated numbers that cannot be traced to any individual interviewed when reporting the findings.

There will be no budgetary considerations or payments for my participation in this study. Maisoun Al-sebaei will be responsible for the cost of traveling to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Respondents will not be rewarded or compensated for participating in this research study.

Please know that the results of this study will be published as part of Maisoun Al-sebaei Master's thesis. This thesis paper will be available at various library systems throughout the United States. Copies can be requested directly from GVSU beginning in January 2013.

If I have any further questions about this study, I may contact the researcher at (+966) 504-460-7959 or by emailing [alsebaem@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:alsebaem@mail.gvsu.edu). I understand that this study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects at Grand Valley State University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), may be contacted at (+1) 616-331-3197 or via email at [hrrc@gvsu.edu](mailto:hrrc@gvsu.edu).

I have read the above form, and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time, and for whatever reason, I consent to participating in today's interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's signature

## Appendix D - Consent Sheet in Arabic

### موافقة على معلومات بشأن دراسة بحثية

جامعة جراند فاللي ستيت  
كلية الاتصالات (قسم دراسات في الاتصال)  
موافقة على معلومات بشأن دراسة بحثية

ميسون أسامة السباعي، طالبة الماجستير في كلية الاتصالات قسم دراسات في الاتصالات، جامعة جراند فاللي ستيت، تجري حالياً دراسة للتعرف على كيف استخدم المصريون المقيمون في المملكة العربية السعودية مواقع التواصل الإجتماعية خلال الثورة المصرية عام 2011.

سوف تتم مقابلاتي للطالبة ميسون السباعي وسوف يطلب مني الإجابة على عدد من الأسئلة المختلفة. المقابلة سوف تستمر ما بين عشرين إلى ثلاثين دقيقة. وإنني أفهم أن مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة هي مشاركة طوعية. لي الحق في التوقف والانسحاب من المقابلة في أي لحظة، لأي سبب من الأسباب، علماً بأن هذه المقابلة سوف يتم تسجيلها لأغراض البحث.

المعلومات التي سوف يتم الحصول عليها من المقابلة ستكون سرية و سوف يتم الاحتفاظ بكل البيانات المسجلة في مكان آمن في خزانة ملفات مغلقة في منزل الباحثة. و سوف تبقى هذه البيانات دائماً في مكان آمن عند الانتهاء من الدراسة. ولن يتم استخدام المعلومات الشخصية في هذه الدراسة، بما في ذلك الأسماء والهويات. سوف تستخدم الباحثة أرقاماً عشوائية لا يمكن من خلالها معرفة هوية أي فرد عند نشر النتائج.

لن يكون هناك أي ميزانية أو مدفوعات لمشاركتي في هذه الدراسة. ميسون السباعي سوف تكون مسؤولة عن تكاليف السفر إلى جدة، المملكة العربية السعودية و لن ييتم مكافأة المشاركين أو تعويضهم عن المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية.

وسوف تنشر نتائج هذه الدراسة كجزء من أطروحة الماجستير لميسون السباعي. وستكون متاحة في مختلف نظم المكتبات في جميع أنحاء الولايات المتحدة. يمكن الحصول على نسخ مباشرة من مكتبة جراند فاللي ستيت في بداية يناير عام 2013.

إذا كان لدي أي أسئلة أخرى حول هذه الدراسة، يمكنني الاتصال بالباحثة من خلال الاتصال بالجوال

50460-7959 (+966) أو عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني [alsebaem@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:alsebaem@mail.gvsu.edu). أتفهم أنه قد تم مراجعة هذه الدراسة والتي وافق عليها مجلس المراجعة التأسيسي (IRB) للدراسات المتعلقة بالجوانب الإنسانية في جامعة جراند فاللي ستيت. وأي مشكلة أو أسئلة تتعلق بالدراسة، يمكنني الاتصال بمجلس المراجعة التأسيسي لحماية الإنسان الخاضع للتجارب (IRBPHS)، على رقم هاتف 616-331-3197 (+1) أو عبر البريد الإلكتروني [hrrc@gvsu.edu](mailto:hrrc@gvsu.edu).

أقر بقراءة هذه الاستمارة، و يمكنني الانسحاب في أي وقت، ولأي سبب كان، وأنا موافقة على المشاركة في مقابلة اليوم.

التاريخ

تاريخ توقيع المشارك

توقيع المقابلة

Appendix E – Examples of designed pictures







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