Social Media Revolutions

All Hype or New Reality?
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New forms of social media have begun to play an increasingly significant role in human interaction. This phenomenon, often referred to as the “social media revolution,” has greatly impacted political dynamics on a global scale. By enabling users to express themselves publicly in ways previously unavailable to them, social media such as Facebook and Twitter have bequeathed new power to the individual. What has changed is not just the way people communicate but the reach and intensity of this communication in real time – twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week – regardless of geographical location and to a virtually unlimited number of people so long as there is access to the Internet. In providing a degree of removal from the physical reality of social change, new media urges the free-thinker to boldly voice opinions while diminishing perceptions of the consequences. The network offered by social media has proven crucial to fostering new forms of collective action. The combination of quality, quantity, and speed of social media fundamentally impacts decision makers and all those potentially touched by the effects of the network.

Social media have given young leaders a unique voice. It is important, however, to emphasize that while there is much attention paid to the technological dimensions of social media as an agent of change, it is still the individual man and woman who remains at the center. The Arab Spring of 2011 has shown that, by transcending national borders and connecting like-minded individuals within milliseconds, the new forms of interaction facilitated by social media hold the power to shake the very foundations of government itself. As social media users experienced, one needed not go farther than one’s Twitter page to discover others who shared their sentiments.

The scale of social media outreach and its “real time,” interactive elements add new and complicated dimensions to political movements and international diplomacy, and there remain many unknowns about the potential outcomes of social media connections. To better understand these emerging dynamics, the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination convened a workshop and panel discussion focusing on social media in April 2011. In the pages that follow, participants in these LISD events analyze the impact of digital tools, social networking, and the Internet in the coordination of democratic movements against authoritarian states, with a specific focus on the Middle East and North Africa.
On February 11, 2011, longtime Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak resigned the presidency after a sustained eighteen-day popular mobilization calling for his ouster. During that mobilization – almost unprecedented in contemporary Arab authoritarian regimes – unified Egyptians demonstrated peacefully, articulating a clear set of demands and occupying key symbolic venues, notably Tahrir (Liberation) Square in downtown Cairo. On the evening of February 10, amidst widespread rumors of Mubarak’s impending resignation, the rei’s made an unapologetic speech, refusing to resign as the protesters desired and carefully noting his long service to Egypt and his determination to fulfill his term in office. His defiance swept over the crowd like a tsunami and the incensed protesters stayed on through the night and into the morning, forcing Mubarak’s resignation a day later than anticipated.

The central role apparently played by new media technologies like Twitter and Facebook in the Egyptian revolution has revitalized a debate about the potential of such tools to undermine authoritarian rule – a debate that seemed closed in favor of the skeptics when Iran’s Green Revolution of 2009 ended not in a transfer of power to the opposition, but rather in a consolidation of power by conservative forces. The role played by Facebook groups like “We Are All Khaled Said” and online activist organizations like the April 6th Youth Movement should at the least unsettle the certainty of prominent skeptics like Evgeny Morozov, who in The Net Delusion argued forcefully that expecting digital activism to unseat authoritarian regimes was wishful thinking at best, and delusional and counter-productive at worst.

Like the Spanish Inquisition, nobody expected the Egyptian Revolution, including scholars, policy makers, and even Egyptians themselves. It is far too early to roll out a definitive history of these events, but we can certainly explain how so many Egyptians ended up in the street starting on January 25, 2011 and how digital technologies contributed to their decision making and success. The Egyptian revolution did not happen because of the Tunisian uprising that directly preceded it. While Egyptians had been inspired by the Tunisians’ success, which included the shocking and humiliating departure of longtime dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, most of the causes of the Egyptian revolution were quite uniquely Egyptian. The focus of this article will thus be to assess the impact of digital activists deploying “liberation technologies”¹, in Larry Diamond’s terminology, or what Clay Shirky has called “social tools.”² Leveraging the potentialities of these tools allowed Egyptian activists to stage an end-run around the country’s moribund political parties and organizations, with the call to

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protest first circulating through Facebook groups. But to truly understand how this happened, we must first understand why activists in authoritarian countries turn to such tools in the first place.

Rather than basing our analyses on a series of temporally-bounded applications that may be eclipsed in a matter of months, it is better to think of them as Social Media Networks. Social Media Networks are distinguished by several unique factors. Importantly, they spread and share information via an individual’s trust-based social networks. Thus, preferences, intentions, and beliefs are transmitted via “friends” and second-order acquaintances and made publicly visible on sites like Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, the applications of Social Media Networks are extremely low cost, usually carried within the total cost of accessing the Internet and purchasing the necessary equipment (i.e., laptop, iPad, cell phone). Social Media Networks are also distinguished by a multiplicity of access options – they can typically be used on any digital device, including smart phones, laptops, and desktop computers. This multiplicity of access modes is creating an ever-denser information technology ecosystem, and complicates any authoritarian regime’s attempt to destroy or disrupt flows of information. Finally, Social Media Networks are fully comprehensible and usable even to novice activists, needing nothing beyond standard computer literacy (and sometimes not even that). This is important because many activists are not tech geeks, but rather political or social entrepreneurs, and the technology itself has democratized the means of activism.

Technologies like Twitter clearly enable rapid, many-to-many communication that can be tactically deployed in moments of crisis. Yet these digital tools do more than simply enhance the tactical capabilities of activists in non-democratic regimes; they may also, under certain conditions, fundamentally alter the nature of daily interactions between authoritarian regimes and their opponents. Digital tools offer individuals in authoritarian regimes venues to participate in public life, since other modes of expression and participation (i.e., newspapers, television, elections) are often closed. Levels of brutality may differ from one regime to the next, but every non-democratic regime in some way restricts the civil and political rights of its citizens in ways that make it impossible for them to register their disapproval of government policies, rectify abuses meted out by police or security services, or organize opposition to unpopular policies or governments. While it is certainly true that using public platforms like Twitter exposes activists to retaliation from regime elites, those same activists continue to harness the power of online networks to engage in the myriad activities of opposition. How can this be?

One answer is that digital technologies reduce many of the well-known costs of collective action. Facebook and other forms of social media, including Twitter, blogs,
and photo-sharing sites, lower the costs of group formation, group-joining, and information sharing to nearly nothing. Mancur Olson argued that getting individuals to contribute to collective action is difficult, since they would prefer that the costs of participation be borne by others. Typically, this dilemma has been solved by large organizations that can bring the resources to bear on problems of collective action—whether interest group organizations like the Sierra Club or entities like political parties. In authoritarian contexts like Egypt, such big, top-heavy organizations are ripe targets for regime repression or co-optation. Furthermore, digital tools reduce the need for such organizations by cutting the opportunity costs of participation in collective actions. While it is true that reduced barriers to participation may lead to reduced commitment levels and lower-stakes actions, it is also true that, as David Karpf argues, getting participants to do something small can often be part of the strategy to convince them to do something bigger.4

Digital tools also enable diffuse actors with common interests—Egyptians from different provinces and backgrounds with a shared interest in putting an end to torture practices—to effectively coordinate the production of ideas, the implementation of best practices, and of course, the tactical coordination of protest activities themselves. By doing so, they produce the “frames” of collective action. To convince individuals to participate in any collective action, whether in democratic or non-democratic societies, organizers must provide the mobilizing rationales that “motivate and legitimate” collective action5—to convince individuals to engage in fundamentally risky behavior like protests. Social Media Networks make it much easier for disparate groups of loosely-connected individuals to invent and agree upon these kinds of frames, all without ever necessarily meeting in person. One of these frames during the Egyptian uprising was “Al-shaab wa’al-gaysh eed wabdah,” meaning “The people and the army are one hand.” Such frames can have powerful effects not only on activists, but also on observers or groups (in this case, the army).

One of the greatest contributions of Social Media Networks to collective action in non-democratic societies is their ability to revolutionize the tactical execution of protest and direct action. Social Media Networks allow organizers to bypass older modes of organization, like printing leaflets (although leaflets too were an important factor in the revolution), making phone calls, and calling physical meetings—actions that in the past may have taken weeks or months to formulate and bring to pass. The ability to do an end-run around this kind of risky activity may in theory reduce some of the potential repressive costs to individuals. By reducing these particular costs, Social Media Networks may make individuals who are uncommitted to action more likely to participate in both the short and also the long run.

Nevertheless, Social Media Networks have perhaps their greatest impact on coordination problems. The ability to communicate with large numbers of people (many-to-many communication) instantaneously allows organizers to make last-minute changes to set plans, thereby avoiding regime monitors and taking back the initiative. Activists can be dispatched to scope out planned sites of protest to check for regime presence. This appears to be what happened with the January 25, 2011 protests in Egypt, when activists misled the regime about planned sites of protest and regrouped elsewhere. Such coordination is not limited to protests alone – other forms of coordination are also streamlined and improved. In particular, Social Media Networks allow activists to reach out to family members of arrested individuals, as well as to contact NGOs which might publicize such disappearances more widely, thereby putting other kinds of pressure on authoritarian elites. This on-the-spot coordination can indeed make a huge difference for arrested activists with no other connections or, as they say in the Arab world, *wasta* (influence gained by virtue of connections to elites).

Scholars believe that opportunities for collective action in authoritarian countries can be quite limited, due to the repressive capacities of non-democratic regimes. Such capacities have been on horrifying display recently in Syria, where the state has deployed unparalleled violence against peaceful activists, killing more than one thousand and detaining many thousands more for the crime of participating in protests. But Syria is a country where thresholds for protesting have already been crossed. Collective action is happening in Syria, but it is being crushed. In fact, the greatest barrier to group action in repressive countries like Syria is not just avoiding the inevitable (and homicidal) response of the state, but also the additional challenges faced in these contexts by anyone seeking to organize and act collectively. These challenges include additional and serious potential physical costs to activists, such as prison time or even death, or even retaliation in the form of job discrimination against activists and their families.

Because these potential costs are so high – in some cases, retribution can be exacted merely for belonging to a group or expressing sympathy for it – individuals are reluctant not only to participate in collective action, but even to express beliefs about the prevailing order or their intentions to contest those conditions. This uncertainty about the beliefs and preferences of others directly affects an individual’s willingness to take to the streets. Social Media Networks effectively reduce the amount of “private information” (i.e., preferences known to yourself, but not to others) in authoritarian information spheres. Uncertainty about such preferences may prevent individuals from participating in collective action, assuming that we all have “thresholds” for becoming active. Because we are greatly influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of those around us,6 and because some people are naturally inclined to protest and others are not, our thresholds may only be met by the participation of friends and acquaintances. Since we can see what our friends and acquaintances intend to do on sites like

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Facebook, it is much easier for those thresholds to be crossed.

Due to this dependence on the attitudes and actions of others, scholars like Timur Kuran have argued that even relatively minor changes in levels of support for (or acquiescence to) a non-democratic regime can trigger a massive revolt. Changes in the international environment (such as US officials declaring that Mubarak should resign after initially appearing to support him) can also alter the calculations of individuals. These massive, sudden revolts can be thought of as informational cascades—seemingly sudden, unpredictable and widespread alterations in individual beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. An informational cascade is likely when “it is optimal for an individual, having observed the actions of those ahead of him, to follow the behavior of the preceding individual without regard to his own information.” Social Media Networks, by revealing information that was previously private or unknown, make informational cascades much more likely.

Social Media Networks operate via social networks, which means that we generally trust the information we see from friends and acquaintances online. Trust is a crucial part of the equation here, since social trust is something that authoritarian regimes intentionally dismantle, and which can be incredibly hard to reconstruct after the fact (as the sad history of post-invasion Iraq can attest). Online social networks like Facebook depend more on trust than is commonly understood. For instance, any single person in the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook group is unlikely to personally know or trust the hundreds of thousands of individuals in that network. However, it is more than likely that they have both close personal friends and also more casual acquaintances that are also members of the group. This has the effect of not only reinforcing the effect of that group on individual identity and preferences, but also binding that individual to the network through the shared trust of known contacts. These recognition networks also have the effect of making it more difficult for regime elites to infiltrate such networks, since individuals attempting to do so are unlikely to be trusted by their peers—their announcements and opinions are of concomitantly lesser value.

Kefaya and the Normalization of Protest Politics

How did these dynamics unfold in Egypt? Both digital activism and the protest wave in Egypt actually stretch back to 2004, when a group called Kefaya (The Egyptian Movement For Change) appeared suddenly on Egypt’s political scene. In Egyptian Arabic, Kefaya means “enough,” and the group was dedicated to ending Egypt’s emer-

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gency rule and reinstating pluralist, constitutional politics. Kefaya’s emergence was largely due to the total stagnation of the Mubarak regime’s promised course of political reform. Instead of showing progress toward greater transparency and accountability, legislative elections held in 1995 and 2000 were actually dominated by corrupt practices like vote rigging, vote buying, and electoral violence. That stagnation, along with frustration about the regime’s complicity in oppression of the Palestinians and the American march to war with Iraq, provided the context for the emergence of a new political group dedicated to ending Egypt’s political status quo.

During its street demonstrations, Kefaya protesters made it commonplace to call for an end to emergency rule, or for Mubarak to step down and be replaced by a democratically elected leader. Such calls – which once upon a time would have ended with a jail sentence – became the ordinary grist of run-of-the-mill politics in Egypt. Furthermore, Kefaya demonstrators perfected a sort of game with the regime, where, for instance, the group would call for protests in Tahrir Square and the government would then surround these modestly-sized groups of activists. Protests staged by the group were often quite small and Kefaya was frequently criticized for falling short of its lofty attendance goals. To make matters worse, the regime intentionally deployed a strategy of gender-based violence against the protestors, including high-profile assaults on female activists, making subsequent protests largely male-only events and justifying even more brutality against those who dared to show up. Nevertheless, in spite of what appeared to be meager successes, Kefaya was important for breaking psychological barriers against demonstrations, for building networks between a new generation of activists and older political figures, and for training thousands of individuals in the tactical art of protesting. Crucially, Kefaya activists were often either bloggers themselves or connected to Egypt’s small but growing digital activist elite. This convergence had the effect of creating higher-profile forms of dissent – thereby increasing the amount of known information about the preferences of other Egyptians.

Meanwhile, at about the same time that Kefaya was taking off, changes in the Egyptian print journalism environment were beginning to ensure broader coverage of dissent. Al-Jazeera, of course, was the first outlet to offer this kind of criticism of the Egyptian regime and its policies, and its effect rippled through an Arab world unaccustomed to hearing criticism of domestic regimes. While Al-Jazeera’s programs were produced outside of Egypt and beyond its reach, this kind of journalism would soon arrive in Egypt, with domestic provocateurs, as well. Soon after Egyptian press laws were changed to better permit private ownership, the daily, independent-owned paper Al-Masry Al-Youm was founded in 2004, and the independent Al-Dustur also began

publishing again after being shuttered in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{12}

As a result of these changes, it was suddenly possible to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television inside Egypt and see and hear stories and ideas that were not somehow orchestrated by the regime. These independent news outlets gave substantial coverage to Kefaya protests and activities, to the writing and activism of bloggers, and to organized laborers. Beginning in 2006, Egypt witnessed a coordinated campaign to establish independent trade unions outside the umbrella of the corporatist Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF). In 2006 and 2007, there were hundreds of strikes and other labor actions. Joel Beinin calculates that 1.7 million people participated in some kind of work action orchestrated by resurgent labor activists between 2004 and 2008.\textsuperscript{13} Perhaps the pivotal work action took place on April 6, 2008, when textile workers in Mahalla Al-Kubra, north of Cairo, staged a strike that turned violent over the course of the day as the regime and strikers squared off. Foreshadowing the regime’s unsuccessful tactics against protesters in Tahrir Square in 2011, the government sent in the dreaded \textit{baltagiya} (plain clothes police) to rough up the Mahalla workers. Activists and security forces continued clashing for days, and while the regime was able to quell that particular revolt, the labor movement itself was clearly on the upswing. Despite the small number of reporters who were able to make it to Mahalla, the story stayed alive via the Twitter feeds and blog posts of workers on the ground, as well as other activists dedicated to telling the world what was happening there.

Even so, the actions of textile workers in an obscure Egyptian city were of limited interest to global audiences. This all changed when, a few weeks before the strike, a movement emerged on Facebook that advocated for a sympathy strike with the textile workers. The organizers asked participants to dress in black, stay home, and not purchase anything on the day in question. Later in the day, protests were planned downtown near prominent venues like the Journalists’ Syndicate. In the classic dynamics of an informational cascade, this Facebook group had 70,000 members shortly after it was founded and even the stodgy government of Mubarak began to acknowledge the threat a few days before the planned action.\textsuperscript{14} When April 6 dawned, Cairo was eerily silent, subsumed by a sandstorm, and the city did indeed appear much quieter than usual. Whether that was due to active participation or fear of clashes between protesters and police remains unclear. But the activists and many (though certainly not all) observers considered the day’s events a triumph for the youth activists – a seemingly leaderless band of college students, liberals, Islamists, and others who articulated the same basic set of demands as Kefaya.

The organizers of April 6 became known as the April 6th Youth Movement, and they

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Joel Beinin, \textit{Justice For All: The Struggle For Worker’s Rights in Egypt} (Washington, DC: The Solidarity Center, 2010).
\item \textsuperscript{14} David Faris, “Revolutions Without Revolutionaries?” \textit{Arab Media and Society}, vol. 2 (Fall 2008).
\end{itemize}
were soon beset by regime harassment and imprisonment, as well as internal splits. The group organized both a follow-up event to coincide with Mubarak’s birthday, on May 4, 2008, and an anniversary strike on April 6, 2009. Neither action garnered the hoped for support and the group was soon dismissed as a frivolous distraction from the necessary work of organizing. The state also set about making it more difficult to connect to the Internet cheaply and anonymously, and had its security services detain many of the group’s leaders. They also deployed other modes of harassment and intimidation. As Wael Abbas told me in 2008, “I was attacked in the official newspapers. I was attacked by security officials on TV. They spread rumors about me converting to Christianity or being a homosexual. They called my family to intimidate them. Everything.” Such defamation was routine for those bold enough to mount frontal challenges to the lawlessness and power of the Mubarak regime. However, analysts may have missed the important cumulative effect of Egypt’s young activists gaining experience and learning from the failures of the organization. They may also have underestimated the importance of this alliance between the Cairene digirati and the on-the-ground laborers of Egypt’s industrial belt – an alliance that would prove to be of great importance during the events of the revolution itself.

The April 6th Youth Movement is often written about from today’s perspective as the birth of Egyptian digital or online activism. But in fact, its success was only made possible after years of difficult community building. Egypt’s most internationally famous bloggers – Sandmonkey, for instance, or Big Pharaoh – wrote in English, seemingly for global rather than local audiences. They were soon joined, and eclipsed in importance, by Arabic language bloggers. Blogger-journalists like the now internationally-renowned Wael Abbas broke important stories about torture and harassment (among many other things), laying the groundwork for the “We Are All Khaled Said” movement in 2010. Bloggers and other ordinary citizens also became experts in the art of “sousveillance,” by which the “watched” turn the tables on their “watchers” by recording acts of violence, brutality, and corruption. Thus, Social Media Networks are useful not just for coordinating dissent and producing ideas, but also for reversing the one-way flow of surveillance that has characterized the modern authoritarian state.

Over the course of the past decade, one of the sousveillance tactics of digital activists was to take and disseminate videos and pictures of police officers abusing citizens. Some of these videos were taken by the police themselves, who would pass along videos to one another via cell phone as a kind of macho braggadocio. The case that forever changed the status of torture in Egypt took place in 2007, when digital activist Wael Abbas posted a video of a bus driver named Emad El-Kabir being tortured by police. The case was taken up by the independent media, the victim was tracked down, and the officers responsible were arrested and prosecuted – nearly unheard of in

the torture archipelago constructed and overseen by former Interior Minister Habib El-Adly (who now faces a possible death sentence). Many Egyptians were aware that torture was taking place and too many had experienced it firsthand. Yet for the majority, seeing the horrifying video of El-Kabir made it painfully clear that Egypt’s police force was lawless and that their loved ones were at risk of being subjected to rape and humiliation for nothing more than petty or imagined crimes. The years following the El-Kabir case saw the unprecedented depiction of torture in films like *Heya Fowda* and the film adaption of Alaa Al Aswany’s *The Yacoubian Building*. The latter, set in 1991, depicted the rape and torture of an earnest young man who then turned to violence and hatred.

This broad based movement against torture, which included not only digital activists, but also lawyers, film makers, and human rights activists, set the stage for the emergence of the “We Are All Khaled Said” movement. Said was an Alexandria businessman who posted a video of what appeared to be police officers dividing up the spoils of a drug bust – an iconic act of sousveillance that exposed the crimes of the officers involved. Tragically, and in apparent retaliation, police abducted Said from an Internet café on June 6, 2010, beat him publicly, and then took him away, where they apparently finished the job. When they dumped the body with his distraught family, police claimed that Khaled Said had died swallowing a bag of marijuana. Two elements added to the legitimacy and intensity of the outrage: first, Said himself appeared to be a clean-cut businessman with no prior police record, thus, there had been no conceivable justification for his murder; second, there were numerous eyewitnesses to the police beating and these witnesses were willing to come forward immediately and press the case. Moreover, Said’s brother released shocking and gruesome photos of Said’s mutilated body, which proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had not perished in the way that the police were claiming. The sheer preposterousness of the official narrative was belied by one iconic picture that made its way around the Internet and soon found its way into news reports.

Finally, the Khaled Said Facebook group was founded by a young Dubai Google executive named Wael Ghonim, who did not appear to know Said. Ghonim, as a secret administrator, devised the group’s name, which resonated with Egyptians who were horrified by this brazen act of violence: *Kulna Khaled Said* (“We Are All Khaled Said”). This resonant frame appealed to the idea that what happened to Khaled Said was not an act of justice, or even part of the regime’s ongoing war with Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, but rather something that could happen to any Egyptian at any time. One important thing to note here is that while “We Are All Khaled Said” was an activist, grassroots, digital organization, it clearly was not started by “ordinary people” per se. Ghonim was not just any citizen with an Internet connection and a dream, but a member of a tiny elite of programmers and cosmopolitan elites who were dedicated to a freer and more democratic Egypt. The gulf between activists like Ghonim and the masses of Egyptians who eventually took to the streets after January 25 remained quite large. Yet “We Are All Khaled Said” managed to capture public attention with its street
demonstrations and its decentralized system of decision making and frame producing. As Ghonim himself describes the genesis of the group:

Everyone started to think that this guy could be my brother. … We didn’t know what are we gonna do. … It was an amazing story how everyone started to feel the ownership. Everyone was an owner in this page. People started contributing ideas. In fact, one of the most ridiculous ideas was, hey let’s have a silent stand, let’s get people to go in the street, face the sea, their back to the street, dressed in black standing up silently for one hour, doing nothing and then just leaving, going back home. … It was great because it connected people from the virtual world, bringing them to the real world, sharing the same dream, the same frustration, the same anger, the same desire for freedom. In fact, the anonymous admin job was to collect ideas, help people to vote on them and actually tell them what they are doing. That’s the power of the Internet. There was no leader, the leader was everyone.17

The campaign for justice waged by the “We Are All Khaled Said” movement – which did succeed in forcing the regime to prosecute the officers responsible for his murder – had the good fortune of coinciding with other notable developments that set the stage for a widespread revolt. One such development was the regime’s decision to turn the November 2010 parliamentary elections into a farce, eliminating nearly all Brotherhood opposition in parliament and allotting ridiculous majorities to the ruling National Democratic Party. These elections stripped all pretense out of the government’s occasional exercises in semi-democratic rule, and made it clear to Egyptians that there in fact was no process of democratization going on at all – the regime had violently and unapologetically reasserted its hegemony over the political sphere in a way that managed to alienate even groups it had previously co-opted.

The proximate trigger for the January 25 revolution was of course the success of Tunisian revolutionaries. Egyptians saw irrefutable proof that even a dictator as firmly entrenched as Zine el-Abadine Ben Ali could be dislodged by peaceful street protest and determination. However, had the easy frame building and coordinating capacity of Social Media Networks been absent, it is unclear that opposition forces could have so quickly agreed on a course of action. Those forces decided on January 25 to coincide with National Police Day. Facebook groups like “We Are All Khaled Said,” as well as a separate group dedicated to getting people to commit to protest, were instrumental in getting the word out. Most major factions of both the official (i.e. tolerated) opposition, as well as the National Movement for Change and the April 6th Youth Movement, backed the protests, sensing a possible moment of confronta-

tion with the regime. A young activist named Asma’a Mahfouz posted an unforgettable video blog the night before the protests, in which she appealed to, among other things, male honor to protect female protesters against the depredations of the police. She told viewers that if they did not protest, they “deserve everything that happens to them.”\(^{18}\) Her video was viewed by tens of thousands of Egyptians. On the day of the protests, turnout exceeded all expectations – as Egyptians became aware that tens of thousands of their fellow citizens were confronting the state in the street, more and more joined them. The informational cascade had been triggered and within 18 days, Mubarak was gone. Despite desperate attempts to shut down the Internet several days into the crisis, there was no way to quell the protests absent massive killing. The rest is revolutionary history.

**Conclusion**

It should be clear that Social Media Networks played a central role in the Egyptian revolution. Not only were digital activists critical for long-running, outside-the-system opposition groups like Kefaya, they also contributed greatly to the opening in the Egyptian information environment that happened over the past eight years. Social Media Networks provided young Egyptians, who previously would not have been able to meet or coordinate with one another, the means to arrive at a set of demands and practices that were tested and honed long before they were deployed during January’s critical juncture. It should also be clear that while an uprising could theoretically have taken place without Social Media Networks, that it did not do so, and that Facebook, Twitter, and cell phones allowed the planners of the January 25 protests to undertake their challenge with incredible speed and tactical savvy.

The information cascade triggered by the Facebook-engineered protests was not about beliefs, but rather intentions. Most Egyptians, as Marc Lynch correctly noted, were probably aware of their fellow citizens’ disaffection with the Egyptian ruling elite. However, only Social Media Networks have the capability to transmit intentions in the manner that the “We Are All Khaled Said” and April 6th groups were able to do prior to the protests. Without the cascade-triggering effects of these technologies, the initial protests may have drawn hundreds rather than thousands of participants, which would have greatly affected the participatory thresholds of other Egyptians and led to the quashing of the revolt before it could gather the momentum it eventually did. We must be careful to avoid the analytic dichotomy of asking whether technology did or did not cause the Egyptian revolution. It is possible to argue that the technologies were necessary for the revolt to unfold exactly as it did, but were not sufficient to trigger similar revolts absent other structural and local factors. Nevertheless, the Egyptian revolution should put to rest any lingering doubt that digital technologies can have a substantial impact on politics in authoritarian regimes – even when the regime in question was aware of the activities of digital activists and actively trying to interfere with them.

\(^{18}\) The video can be seen with English subtitles at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgIlgMdsEuk.
HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRIBUTED TO THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION
Ahmed Ghanim

Though I am no expert on social media, I am writing to share my personal experience with this new technology in Egypt and convey how it changed my life in the course of changing my nation. Social media can be best characterized as a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 to provide a platform for the exchange of user-generated content – or user ideas and information. Whether in the form of a flier hung in a local school or a Facebook post, user-generated content expresses the unfiltered ideas and opinions of its creator.

For most of my life, there have only been two types of media in Egypt: the huge, highly funded, state-run media, which the government monitored and censored, and secretive activism, the weak, cheap, and soft-spoken “other” media. As an Egyptian activist, I was always involved with this “other” media, which in recent years has been transformed by social media.

Well before the dawn of social media, I first became politically active as a 13 year-old schoolboy when I created my own “user-generated content.” I had worked all night constructing what we in Egypt called Majalet Ha2et – or a “wall magazine” – which is a large, handmade poster filled with news, articles, and information. As a frustrated youth, I decided to make my wall magazine complete with anti-government articles and political cartoons. Once finished, I headed to school extra early so that I could hang the poster before anyone else arrived. Little time passed before word of this “taboo” poster had spread through the school like wildfire. Students pushed left and right to read my ideas as I quietly stood to the side, listening to their feedback, which unfortunately could not come quickly enough. Breaking through the crowd, the school principal and janitor hurriedly ushered students away and tore down the poster, squashing my first small attempt at political activism in one swift move. I merely stood there and watched as the janitor destroyed my creation and the principal frantically demanded the culprits’ names. Amid this chaos, I was overcome with mixed emotions: I was proud over what I had accomplished as a meager 13 year-old and exhilarated from the so-called “five minutes of heaven” I felt as I watched my peers read and enjoy my work; yet, at the same time, I was frustrated by the barriers that suppressed me from freely sharing this information with everyone and from openly standing up for what I believed to be right.

On this day, I came to recognize the importance of anonymity as well as the barriers that one must overcome in order to be heard. In addition, I learned there was great value to be had not only in expressing my ideas, but also in harvesting my peers’ reactions and encouraging collaboration. As an aspiring political activist, I felt a great
sense of isolation in not knowing whether my personal sentiments toward the status quo were widely shared among my peers. There was little opportunity in Egypt to learn this information since open discussion on such matters was largely forbidden. Moreover, as I watched my creation get torn to pieces, I realized that political activism in an authoritarian environment has a very limited lifespan. Under the Mubarak regime, one noticed early on that Egyptian officials were swift to squelch any act of political opposition. I knew my efforts to express my ideas would last only a short time before the authorities smothered them – which had been quite quick in this case! In sum, this experience taught me four important lessons about political activism in Egypt:

1. Anonymity is important for self-preservation when expressing anti-government or political ideas;

2. Communal feedback and collaboration foster information dissemination and community building;

3. A political activist can feel isolated and unsure when it is unclear whether their personal sentiments are shared by the greater community; and

4. The swift crackdown methods of authoritative institutions can dramatically shorten the lifespan of activist efforts.

Later in life, when I was in medical school, my friends and I resolved to again challenge the status quo and push against the institutional barriers that suppressed us. Knowing that posters would be destroyed and fliers would be trashed, we decided to take it to the next level: we would “publish” our political messages by painting them on the school’s exterior walls. We hid in the school after-hours until everyone had left the premises. At 9:00pm, with paint and brushes in hand, we emerged from hiding and set to work writing our thoughts on the buildings. Yes, years before Twitter, we were publicly sharing our short, anonymous messages on the walls of our school. We felt defiant as we “tweeted” on the wall because we felt we had circumvented the authorities – our efforts would surely survive their crackdown methods, at least for a short while. Once our work was complete, we sneakedily left by way of a construction zone to avoid the main gate where we surely would have been arrested. There was a bit of a scare when some watchdogs in the area chased us and even successfully bit some of us. Nevertheless, we escaped and excitedly anticipated the morning, when dawn would shed light on our creation.

Shockingly, when we went to see our work the next morning, we found completely blank walls. School officials had hastily brought in construction workers to paint over our masterpiece. While the authorities had successfully suppressed our efforts, we did not feel defeat. We quickly got to work on our next plan: to publish a then state-of-the-art, printed school magazine. For the inaugural issue, we sold all 3,000 copies.
Despite efforts to maintain our anonymity, we still were threatened with expulsion from medical school and even arrest, but because of the magazine’s success, we did not feel deterred. It was incredible to see students walking around, reading this political magazine, so we went on to publish a second issue. The threats of expulsion soon became so great that we needed to cease publication of the magazine for the sake of our medical careers. Nevertheless, our determination did not subside; the activists inside us continued to grow.

Toward the end of medical school, I began blogging just as the Internet was becoming popular. With blogging, I found that my activist efforts attained an ever-longer life-span. The blog enabled me to maintain my anonymity while still communicating my political humor and sharing articles as they related to the political turmoil. As more Internet users became familiar with blogging, my blog posts received more views and comments. The opportunities for collaboration were growing, though there was still a long road ahead. Nevertheless, blogging provided a valuable platform where I could voice my opinions, maintain my anonymity and not feel isolated, especially as the blogging community grew.

To demonstrate the power of the Internet and the growth of digital activism in Egypt, consider the case of Emad El Kabeer, a young Egyptian bus driver who was first arrested for charges that were considered foolish and then tortured by the Egyptian police. Blogger Wael Abbas released a video of the incident online that depicted the brutality of the torture. Due to Abbas’ post, authorities were able to identify and arrest two of the torturers. Their arrest verified the influence of digital activism, thereby inspiring an entire generation of young bloggers who would come to bring down the entire regime.

Shortly after this trial, Facebook entered the scene, though at a slower growth rate in Egypt versus the United States. The site quickly evolved from a mere social tool for communicating with friends to become the central site for organizing protests, promoting movements, disseminating information, and much more. The exchange of thoughts and ideas was so widespread, that I was even surprised to find that my old poem, “Stand Up and Revolt,” had been used by a group of Tunisian students on a Facebook page advocating for the Tunisian revolution.

Then came the April 6th Youth Movement. Using mainly Facebook, Egyptians coordinated strikes and demonstrations throughout the country to occur on April 6, 2008. Dubbed the “Egyptian Intifida,” the April 6th activists called for civil disobedience by asking Egyptians to stay home from work and avoid making purchases. The movement first began as an initiative of the workers of El-Mahalla El-Kubra City, but activists soon joined in when they realized the opportunity to effect change. Word of the movement spread quickly via social media and cell phones. A Facebook group called “April 6 Youth Movement” attracted more than 64,000 members and was critical in expanding the strike nationwide, beyond El-Mahalla El-Kubra City.
Facebook indeed had been central to the success of this political uprising. Even without the official support of a traditional political party, the site aided in motivating the Egyptians to publicly protest and rise against their oppressors. It was just the beginning of the “Facebook activism” phenomenon.

Next came the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page, which took digital activism to the next level. Khaled Said, a 28 year-old Egyptian from Alexandria, had been tortured to death at the hands of two police officers. Several eyewitnesses described how the two policemen took Khaled into the entrance of a residential building, where he was then brutally punched and kicked. The policemen banged his head against the wall, the staircase, and the entrance steps. As recounted in many eyewitness reports, despite Khaled’s calls for mercy, the police continued to torture him until he died.

Within a few hours of the incident, some activists created the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page. In his horrific death, Khaled had suddenly become the symbol for Egyptian youth who viewed their country as a failing state filled with brutality and corruption, and desperate for change. The page quickly amassed hundreds, then thousands of fans, and kept growing.

Officials within Mubarak’s regime dubbed the digital activists the “keyboard fighters” – to belittle them and deride them as a useless force with merely virtual power and no tangible, real world influence. In defiance, the page owners worked to leverage their influence by communicating to their followers and motivating the frustrated youth to take action beyond their Facebook posts. This virtual movement would now take to Egypt’s streets.

First, there were silent stands: no shouting, no demonstrations, no clashing – just silent stances against the government that had all been coordinated by means of digital tools. Tens of thousands of young Egyptians all wore black and stood silently along the Nile River. This simple movement served a big purpose: without causing much friction, it eased the fears of digital activists and trained them for future protests.

In January 2010, I wrote an article called, “Egypt Does Not Need A National Hero,” which contended that we were in the dawn of a new age of social media. Egypt did not need a single national hero to lead the revolution; with the collaborative power of social media, everyone could be a part of the movement. We all could be heroes together. Before this technology, people sought a kind of biblical hero that would come and free the people from the tyranny of the modern-day pharaohs. That is now history. Gone are the stories of Moses. With social media, the Egyptian people are the heroes. Together, we could make change. Together, we could be the change. My article went viral on the Internet and was copied to thousands of forums and blogs, opening the debate over this new idea that we do not really need a leader to lead us to revolt. For me, this was the real role of social media in the revolution – it answered Egypt’s need for a national hero by making its people the heroes.
This was how the revolution started – as a popular movement with no hero or leader. After witnessing the success of the Tunisian revolution, Egyptian activists called for massive demonstrations on January 25, National Police Day in Egypt. What started as a demonstration turned into a popular revolution with millions of young Egyptians taking over the streets of Egypt.

Shortly after the revolution started, the government decided to put a stop to what they considered to be source of the problem – the Internet. So, they shut down the Internet. Yes, we were in the dark in Egypt. Cell phones could not properly work and the Internet was completely down. Mubarak thought that by shutting down the Internet, he could put an end to the “Friday of Rage” on January 28. It was too late though. The youth had already spread the word and the movement only continued to grow.

During the uprising, the youth were finding ways to share their stories. Google made phone numbers available for tweeting, so that people could share their stories by phone. It was not long before these stories took Twitter by storm. While in Tahrir Square, I even tweeted by proxy. When my phone was working – which was not exactly common for the many thousands of people in Tahrir Square – I would call my friend in the US to update my Twitter account. Through this system, I was one of the small few who were able to tweet during the early days of the revolution. As a result, I began to receive many calls from international news outlets looking for updates during Mubarak’s last days in power.

Following Mubarak’s resignation, I was privileged to interview US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Symbolically recognizing the significance of social media in the Egyptian revolution, Secretary Clinton agreed to conduct a question-and-answer session by fielding questions from the youth of Tahrir Square. Over only two days, we received over 7,000 questions via Masrawy.com, Twitter, and Facebook – further evidence of social media’s utility.

Reflecting upon my earlier experiences as a youth activist, it is amazing to think that I have grown from this small boy posting a wall magazine to now having been provided the opportunity to interview the US Secretary of State and write this article. It is clear that social media has been so effective because it has addressed four key elements:

1. It permits activists to maintain their anonymity, which serves as a protective barrier against those who may oppress or harm them;

2. It fosters information dissemination and builds a sense of community by creating a platform for users to share and promote their ideas;

3. It provides a relatively safe forum for young activists to share their opinions and feel reassured when their sentiments are felt by others; and
4. It circumvents the swift crackdown methods of authoritarian institutions, especially when technology companies such as Google provide additional avenues for activists to share their stories.

Thus, social media has allowed activists, like me, to freely share their thoughts and ideas – and it only continues to grow. While the mediums for sharing ideas are sure to change, social media is likely here to stay.
Open Up! How Social Media is Enabling Self-Determination and Self-Actualization
Barry Libert and Michael Mayer

Moving from Leader to Individual Determination for Growth

In an age in which technology is rapidly evolving and traditional organizational and leadership models are becoming obsolete, real-time communications and social networking are proving to be the primary sources of growth and productivity for businesses and governments alike. The concept of internally researching and developing innovative products and services to fulfill the needs of customers and citizens is fast becoming less valued and less efficient.\(^1\) At the same time, traditional top-down and closed communications are losing ground to peer-based and open interactions through the ever-growing use of social and mobile technologies. The result is enhanced customer and citizen loyalty and engagement.\(^2\)

Equally interesting, existing leadership and management structures are rapidly evolving. Increasingly, new technologies are giving individuals voices inside and outside organizations, enabling them to achieve their personal goals of freedom and well-being.\(^3\) Further, this shift in “voice” is producing a new model of authority in which individuals and communities are gaining sway versus organizations and leaders that have long held it. Examples of this shift in determination and actualization are everywhere. General Motors and Blockbuster are catastrophic examples of this transition in business. General Motors used to be the largest automaker in the world. However, thinking erroneously that they knew what their customers wanted, GM’s leadership-directed model failed to adapt to the real needs of their customers. Similarly, Blockbuster’s traditional “brick and mortar,” investor-actualized business model did not adapt to today’s customer-determined models promulgated by Netflix and Hulu. As a result, it also failed.

This transition to individual self-determination and actualization is also apparent in government. Following the Tunisian revolution, citizens protested the government-led model of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Mubarak operated with a distant, oppressive leadership style that ignored the needs and desires of the Egyptian citizens. Riding the wave of unrest in the region and infused with a sense of empowerment and autonomy provided to them through social and mobile technologies, the Egyptians revolted and eventually overthrew Mubarak. Not too long after, the equally oppressive rule of


Muammar Gaddafi in Libya was challenged by a widespread protest of self-directed citizens wanting a better, self-actualized life.

The good news – this shift in determination and actualization away from organizations to individuals – expends sources of growth and capability. Consequently, this article seeks to help organizations, both public and private, understand how online communities and open communications can simultaneously enhance individual well-being and overall economic growth. For the purposes of this article, the term “organization” or “institution” refers to both businesses and governments. It also provides an underlying theoretical framework for calculating the measurable returns that result from investing in the people, skills, processes, and technologies that directly relate to the enabling of self-determination and individual empowerment. To do this, it provides some background on the psychological underpinnings of peoples’ needs for self-determination and actualization, while also highlighting the current technology’s ability to fulfill these needs. Then, it explores the impact of social networks on an organization’s growth and productivity and today’s leadership models. To conclude, the article shows that by tapping into everyone’s fundamental need for belonging, self-mastery, and purpose (self-actualization), while facilitating the realization of its constituents’ full capacity, an organization – be it a for-profit or not-for-profit – can achieve its true potential.

**Background on Organizational versus Individual Design**

More and more, people today are joining and actively participating in online social networks and communities. These networks are increasingly acting as the primary media for empowering consumers and employees, as well as citizens and taxpayers, to engage in two-way communications that help them achieve their personal objectives. But, how can we measure the effectiveness of such networks on growth and productivity in an individual’s pursuit of self-determination and self-actualization? Is there real economic value for organizations and leaders that invest in this new model? In short, the answer is yes.

The economic benefits of using social and mobile technologies, as well as building online communities are twofold.

First, by creating a sense of connection and relationship, social networks satisfy the intrinsic human need for belonging, which eventually leads to high levels of trust and loyalty. Simply put, it is human nature to want to be around, communicate, and interact with other people. Once this sense of relationship and belonging is formed within...
a community, a certain level of trust is established. When people feel like they belong to a common network or community that has a meaningful purpose, they willingly and comfortably share information with other community participants. Moreover, they more readily imitate purchase behavior, leading to higher levels of development. Additionally, research shows that people trust recommendations from peers and community members more than they do from leaders and institutions. Given this tendency, peer-based communications have lucrative implications for organizations. In addition, this sense of belonging and connectedness creates strong loyalty and satisfaction, leading to additional growth in organizational and individual capacity. For example, Facebook has successfully exploited Maslow’s need for belonging and has created a nearly $100 billion company with over 650 million users. These “friends” constantly connect and share their personal and business experiences to achieve their own needs – be they personal or professional. The lure of connecting with friends and associates, as well as other citizens and taxpayers, is changing the global political, economic, healthcare, and financial worlds as we know them.

Second, by enabling open communications and collaboration, organizations can improve innovation and growth as their constituents realize their full potential. In this regard, not only do social networks expedite and enhance the traditional R&D process, but they also infuse community participants with a feeling of self-mastery and accomplishment. One rung higher than the need for belonging in the human needs hierarchy, Maslow identified the need for self-mastery as the gatekeeper to actualization and ultimate fulfillment. By reaching out beyond the walls of the traditional organization, leaders are able to leverage individuals’ innate need for self-mastery by encouraging interested parties (whether related to the firm or not) to develop their

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12. Pink, Drive.

own thoughts and capabilities to benefit others.\textsuperscript{14} This concept of peer-production, or crowd-sourcing, yields more effective results at a much lower cost than traditional means of production. This increased efficiency and cost-cutting lead to increased margins for companies and governments alike.\textsuperscript{15} They also lead to higher constituent satisfaction as participants are given an opportunity to determine their own direction and well-being.\textsuperscript{16}

A Framework For Organizational and Individual Growth and Development

Recently, McKinsey and Company (Winter 2011) published its fourth annual research report on these topics. With increasing clarity, it shows that organizations that go open and embrace today’s technologies to help individuals achieve their own potential reach higher levels of growth and productivity.

The OpenMatters Value Framework further clarifies these results. It is based on the company’s observations derived from building and investing in social, mobile, and cloud technology companies that together manage online communities with more

Value Framework

The first step in opening up an organization is seeing where they currently stand. From there we see how we can create significant value, by increasing the flow of information.

Image by Barry Libert and reproduced by permission of OpenMatters, Inc.


than 3 billion interactions a month for nearly 500 large clients. Specifically, the framework shows that in today’s networked world, a company’s or country’s growth and productivity are a direct function of the number of people it enables to:

- Self-determine in concert with their friends, family, and followers (breadth); and
- Self-actualize based on their own desires, wants, and needs (depth).

A country or organization’s growth and productivity are therefore a direct product of its ability to create open communication and connections with individuals (breadth), which lead to more active levels of engagement and commitment. In particular, research indicates that in business, the greater the number of fans and followers an organization has, the lower its costs of marketing and the higher its retention and sales rate. This contrasts with the more traditional and costly approach of top-down management and marketing, which is externally driven and does not allow for self-determination. Consequently, the size and vitality of an organization’s community can serve as a proxy for a company’s growth.

Furthermore, an organization’s “depth” is a function of its capacity to facilitate individual actualization via crowd-sourcing, tapping into the collective knowledge and motivations of its individual members. Research has shown this method to be more effective and beneficial than traditional means of production, which again is determined by others (e.g., leaders) on behalf of the organization (e.g., not individuals realizing their own needs and ideas). Specifically, as countries and businesses seek to grow and innovate, their ability to foster self-direction and self-actualization will directly impact their productivity and use of capital.

Thus, the OpenMatters Value Framework maps a country’s or business’ ability to generate top and bottom line growth by using today’s technologies to cultivate individual determinism, goal fulfillment, and open collaboration. At the same time, it depicts how self-determination can help an organization innovate, manufacture, and distrib-

ute new products and services without the traditional expense of scarce resources. Finally, the Framework reflects that in today's increasingly open and networked world, managing, leading, and organizing without a connected, self-actualizing community of friends and followers is likely to result in increased dissatisfaction and lower innovation.

In summary, the OpenMatters Value Framework relies on several primary sources of research that affirm the following:

- An organization's (both country and company) growth prospects are based on the number of constituents that are achieving ever-increasing levels of self-direction, or breadth, via the community they are forging through the use of today's technologies;

- An organization's (both country and company) ability to research, innovate, and produce new products and services is a direct function of the ambition and capacity of its constituents to achieve their individual goals, or depth, which improves its margins, productivity, and capital efficiency.

**Definition of 4-Stage Organizational Developmental Model**

To help leaders further understand the four-stage developmental model and where they are on it, below is a summary of each stage of development:

- Stage 1: Physical and Closed – Physical and closed businesses and countries grow slowly with high costs of production, as they rely on their own resources (their customers, their employees, their capital, and their balance sheets). Most companies or governments fit into this category, given the history of how these entities have evolved. Namely, that growth is based on an organization's utilization of internal resources, including the labor and capital they can raise and deploy. Simply speaking, a company's output is a function of the utility and size of its workforce and capital accumulation. Additionally, the amount of productivity a company or coun-

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try accumulates via human capital and advanced technological capability results in even higher growth and output (basic economic production and growth theories). However, research has shown that this traditional, inward-looking approach is running out of steam and may not be the most effective means to cultivate a prosperous organization, because there is little room for individual development.

- Stage 2: Online and Available – Available organizations take advantage of the power of social networking to create an interconnected web of users. They capture the immense influence of linking individuals together, or “friending,” by exploiting the human need for belonging. Online and available institutions connect people across all fields, cultures, and locations to grow virally through word of mouth and other online, community-based interactions, which ultimately consume less capital in creating constituent loyalty and retention. However, this approach to acquisition and retention is novel as these technologies have only recently emerged. Consequently, organizations should closely monitor relationships with their online communities of current and potential supporters to properly identify their needs. Such monitoring will ensure that these interconnected individuals act as the organization’s source of marketing, image and reputation building, and sales, as in the case of businesses.

- Stage 3: Social and Engaged – Social and engaged organizations generate new and innovative products and services well beyond their own, internal capabilities through the collective wisdom of crowds they have assembled. These crowds act on their own behalf to achieve self-mastery as well as to accomplish for the benefit of the organization. Social and engaged institutions work by allowing their constituents to fully achieve their own creative potential and by satisfying the intrinsic, psychological yearning for self-accomplishment. They encourage constituents to determine their own fate or path and facilitate the process of individual actualization. By doing so, the investment required to innovate, conduct R&D and produce new products and services is lower than that of an organization that relies primarily on its own resources. Over time, this type of organization

can innovate faster and at lower costs than more traditional institutions that do not allow for individual determinism and self-actualization.\textsuperscript{32}

- Stage 4: Open and Networked – Open and networked entities represent the future organizational design for institutions. In open and networked organizations, communities of customers, prospects, employees, citizens, and partners act as agents for the entity. They promote and design its marketing, sales and political campaigns. They also develop and deliver new, innovative products and services to meet the needs of society at large. Open and networked institutions give community participants purpose in connecting to others’ diverse abilities, capacities, and skill sets. They fuse the notion of widespread interconnectedness (breadth) with individual achievement and determinism (depth) to create a vast network of intellectual, creative, and expansive exchange. Most importantly, because the open and networked enterprise has aligned its community members’ needs for determinism, recognition, and mastery to reach a peak level of self-fulfillment, this form of organization has the greatest opportunity for growth and productivity improvements. By moving up the OpenMatters Value Framework (allowing for individual determinism and actualization) and by moving to the right (expanding communication and creating new links), an organization can near institutional actualization.\textsuperscript{33} That is, by creating a widespread, interconnected network of motivated and enabled supporters who can determine their own fate, an institution can reach its utmost potential.

While the OpenMatters Value Framework was originally developed as a new model of growth and productivity that is a function of individual well-being, it is increasingly a model that can be used to help leaders think about how to communicate and operate in today’s connected world to generate benefits for their organizations.

Limitations and Risks of the Framework

The Value Framework is a new approach to organizational strategy, human development, and resource allocation. It is intended to help leaders better understand how to achieve their true potential – both organizationally and individually. However, given the novelty of this model, the framework has a number of limitations:

- Communities Matters: Building online social networks of constituents with


similar wants and needs to achieve top-line growth are only one factor in an organization’s attractiveness. It does not address bad products, policies, or services, let alone poor management and leadership. More than likely, the community will increase the market’s awareness of such poor governance (as citizens are doing in the Middle East), hurting the organization via accelerated word of mouth communications.34

- Crowd-Sourcing Matters: Creating a crowd to help organizations innovate and develop products, services, and ideas have several legal implications, including who owns the intellectual property of the innovation.35 In addition, building productive crowds has costs that must be clearly identified and compared to the cost of internal development.36

- New Technologies Matter: The OpenMatters Value Framework depends heavily on the use of today’s technologies, as well as enlightened management and transparent leadership. As individuals worldwide become increasingly connected, the framework will have additional supporting research, measurement and business processes to support. However, this approach to finding driving growth and productivity for individuals and organizations is at an early stage and needs to be carefully monitored.

- Outcomes Matter: Open and networked communities can be detrimental to a firm or country if allowed to evolve and grow on their own without proper guidance or direction just as existing management and leaders have. An institution’s management should be focused on creating and building communities and open communications, thus creating productivity.37

- Measurement Matters: As with any strategic framework, as public and private organizations build their networks of customers and employees, citizens and tax payers, they should think in terms of traditional constraints – time, money, and people. Consequently, all organizations need to build processes and measurement systems to keep track of the progress they make in these new endeavors as well as the returns they generate from enabling self-determination and self-actualization.

Conclusion: Individual Determination and Actualization Matter

Given that the importance of social networks is accelerating, the OpenMatters Value Framework can serve as a simple tool for helping a country or corporation’s view of where it is in its transition (leader or individual centered determination and actualization). Further, it can serve as a starting point for discussing resource allocation, growth opportunities, and productivity enhancements among strategic business or political units. More broadly, the Value Framework highlights the importance of inspiring feelings of belonging, self-determinism, and self-mastery in social networks and online communities in order to optimize growth and productivity.

Certainly, a business that exists only to produce products or services with internal resources is at a loss in the modern economy. Additionally, despite the growth and recent interest in Facebook and Twitter, it is not enough anymore for an organization to solely exist as an e-commerce entity, with countless numbers of friends and followers to stimulate its image through word of mouth. Nor is it sufficient for an institution to use these technologies to create social engagement with its constituents. To get the most out of any network and people, organizations must move up and to the right in the OpenMatters Value Framework and capitalize on the power and desires of individuals to choose their own path and reach their own self-determined goals.

Creating real and measurable productivity in a networked world requires establishing a vast, connected environment of constituents that tap into their own collective knowledge and desire to fulfill their individual goals and objectives. But in order to do so, leaders must recognize the immense advantage of empowering their supporters and constituents and adapt to this major shift in their organizations. No longer can organizations lead from the top-down and rely on their employees, customers and citizens to “follow” and generate wealth and intellectual property for the “top” (including universities). Rather, they must lead in a way that gives individuals autonomy to make decisions about their well-being. When individuals are given such freedom and are empowered to lead and not be led, self-actualization occurs, benefiting not just the individuals, but also the organizations they serve.

In summary, today’s leaders (presidents, teachers, coaches, etc.) need to quickly follow suit or they will find themselves swept up in the dust with the likes of Blockbuster and Egypt. Times have changed and the challenge is clear. To thrive in today’s open and networked era, businesses and governments need to form an interactive alliance with individuals in which everyone together is focused on individual self-determination and self-actualization. The results will be improved growth and prosperity for all.

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1. Corcoran, “The Broad Reach of Social Technologies.”
Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the rise of social media as a tool and instrument of social change is the fact that, less than half a decade ago, online social-networking services were derided by just about everyone. Facebook was the digital simulacra of college students’ bad decisions. Twitter was a swamp of meaningless life updates from chronic narcissists. MySpace, the industry leader at the time, was seedy and sleazy and painful to look at. Yet today, we are well on our way to regard access to social media as a necessity, not a novelty, and millions of people look to it as their first and fastest source of information for what is happening in some of the world’s most dramatic global changes.

It is impossible to pinpoint a single moment when the world realized that social media was far more than a momentary digital fad, but for many people, it was the morning of January 15, 2009, when a number of people working in offices on the western side of Manhattan island took to Twitter posts (or “tweets”) and Facebook status messages to say that they had just witnessed the impossible: a commercial airliner landing in the Hudson River outside their windows. Minutes later, a photograph was posted to Twitter by someone who happened to be stationed on a rescue boat in the river, an astonishing snapshot that could make any newspaper photographer jealous.

To the traditional news media, there was as much work do be done in parsing the mass of social media updates from the scene of the incident – in which, incredibly, all 155 passengers on board US Airways Flight 1549 were safe – as there was in the standard means of reporting on breaking news of national interest. They had the ability to access countless eyewitnesses, sources who would otherwise be largely anonymous, but at the same time they were confronted with social media's potential to spread misinformation as well as the truth, and shouldered the added responsibility to debunk it if they believed that misinformation might spread. All the while, they had to cope with a new kind of news consumer: the reader and viewer who wants every detail in real-time from just about anywhere in the world, and more often than not, who also wants to re-broadcast that news and offer his or her own commentary through social media.

Eighteen months later, social media now has one role or another in nearly every breaking news story, from the cascading political upheaval in one Middle Eastern country after another to the public humiliation of elected officials revealed to be engaging in secret (and unsavory) digital lives. And it is worth asking: where is it all going?

Social media has shifted the reporting and recounting of current events from the domain of the few – networks, newspapers, magazines – to the many. There is now a stark and sometimes uncomfortable human side to global change: witness Sohaib
Athar, better known as Twitter user @reallyvirtual, who soared to momentary fame in May 2011 when he tweeted complaints about overhearing gunfire in his hometown of Abbottabad, Pakistan that turned out to be the US ambush responsible for killing Osama bin Laden. It used to be that these bits of unnerving, unwitting humanity in the news were rare: a photojournalist for a magazine is lucky enough to capture a snapshot of a bystander whose gestures or facial expression, by chance, embody the nature of whatever conflict or issue he or she will come to represent. The quintessential example is Sharbat Gula, a teenage refugee in Afghanistan whose piercing green-eyed gaze appeared on a 1985 cover of National Geographic in the midst of the Afghan-Soviet conflict.

Now, green eyes or not, there are countless Sharbat Gulas – civilian faces of conflict and change – and thanks to social media, they no longer are anonymous bystanders. There is a global audience at the waiting that can reach out to them, provide a vehicle of remote support, and in some cases propel their message further. More importantly, they are agents of the news rather than subjects of the news. Had US Airways Flight 1549 landed in the Hudson River fifteen years ago, the people who had been on board boats in the river might have been momentary subjects of interest in the background of a photo. But in our era there was Janis Krums, @jkrums, who posted that now-iconic cell phone camera image to Twitpic and saw it “retweeted” first by people who already “followed” his Twitter account, then by people who may have been trawling Twitter for information about the Hudson landing, and then by those with some reach in the news community who were eager to spread the word about this breaking event.

This means that the traditional power structure of the media has been fundamentally transformed. Unlike television or print news, social media is a conversation rather than a one-way medium. For that reason, the audience is of far more significant importance. They are now tasked with being broadcasters in addition to readers, passing the word all the way up to international news outlets from near-anonymous online users who never would have thought their reach was truly public. This effect of news making its way to the top from the unlikeliest of places – a Janis Krums, a Sohaib Athar, or on a level of less global gravitas, a Joshua Kaufman, who created an impromptu blog called “ThisGuyHasMyMacbook” to post photos of the thief who had filched his computer in the hopes that it would be recovered – is fueled by the most active participants in social news, a class of “curators” around the world who have learned to deftly navigate the labyrinthine expanse of social media.

Many of the “curators” themselves have become must-follow figures in the media world. But traditional journalists are learning valuable skills from this batch of mostly-amateur enthusiasts hard at work trawling Twitter and Facebook to whet their insatiable appetites for fresh, breaking news. It has broadened the expertise required (or semi-required) to be a news reporter: say, the ability to handle a packed dashboard in TweetDeck, a social media filtering tool that can be configured to follow certain
topics or certain groups of people through Twitter and other networks; or the ability to quickly use an iPhone or Android device to snap a video from the front lines of an unfolding news story, quickly edit it, and upload to the masses.

True, the idea of a “citizen journalist,” widely hyped in the mid-2000s as a potentially massive threat to the traditional media, turned out to be half-baked; researching and reporting an entire event is still, and should remain, the domain of professionals. As a corollary, start-ups devoted to user-contributed news have largely been flops. One of the few holdouts, local news emporium Patch, remains a big question mark. Parent company AOL has fueled it with resources, and it scored a major win recently when a Patch reporter in a New Jersey town posted photographs of the state’s governor taking a taxpayer-funded helicopter ride to his son’s Little League game, but Patch’s ability to sustain a healthy revenue stream has not yet been proven. But anyone is now entitled to be a piece of the intricate puzzle that is an unfolding news story, and many have chosen to take very active roles. When news-hungry Twitter users are able to see events like the Arab Spring unfold practically in real-time, though they may be thousands of miles away, they may grow so invested in following and continuing to re-broadcast what is happening that the otherwise faraway story may be fueled with significantly more lasting power than it would have had in a world dominated by mainstream network news. This ongoing energy and attention may well have a positive effect among those who are on the front lines seeking change.

Of course, this upheaval of the news business through the addition of social media and those who curate it can have massive implications for misinformation as well. In the deplorably over-covered case of New York Congressman Anthony Weiner’s Twitter-flavored sex scandal, social media’s punditry pounced on the story early on and claimed to have unearthed new leads, new proof of conspiracy theories, new evidence that Weiner’s incriminating photos had been altered. Much of this was wildly untrue, and these amateur news curators (not to mention mainstream journalists) were then tasked with course correction. The constantly changing nature of the Internet means that the debunking of misinformation can happen in a relatively clean and timely fashion, but perhaps not before innocent parties have been dragged into the midst. Had bloggers and online news curators wrongfully implicated someone as being a subject of Weiner’s digital harem, the damage for that individual would have been embarrassing at best.

So where is it all going? Well, we don’t know. The paradoxical truth is that, as scintillating a role as social media has had in the press spotlight for the past two years, we are going to see it fade away. It is not that Facebook and Twitter are going to disappear any time soon, but by 2015 or perhaps even sooner, they are going to be so commonplace that we will expect – and indeed, we should already – that they will be integral contributors to just about every major new story. There will still be novelty, of course, as new services emerge and provide ways to further enhance the digital social experience, as we have seen with the current wave of mobile applications that take advantage of
the user’s physical location (Foursquare is the start-up that has gathered the most attention here). But social media is well on its way to becoming a part of the world as we have come to accept and understand it, and a means of communication and broadcast as familiar as any other.

Nonetheless, the new issues we will have to face will not deal directly with the technology itself. As social media grows ever more ubiquitous around the world, we will have to face broader questions of ownership, of control, of identity. Who actually owns the content of social networks? If access to the likes of Facebook or Twitter is considered a right, not a privilege, how do we reconcile this with the fact that both services are businesses intending to make a profit rather than public utilities? Who should be in charge of identity verification? Or should social networks permit anonymity in order to protect those whose online profiles may make them real-life targets for totalitarian governments?

We do not have answers to these questions, and with the rate of technological change happening as quickly as it is, we often cannot even predict how things will have unfolded in ten years, five years, or even six months. So how can it concurrently be true that social media will become part of the fabric of how we consume and communicate, rather than a glaring novelty? That’s because we are beginning to understand that, online and offline, we now live in a world where information travels faster and more publicly than we ever could have imagined it. Upheaval and unpredictability, whether it be in social revolutions or in the new technologies that now power the ways in which we hear about them, will be something that we grow to expect.

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In this article, I reflect on the relationship between social media and the Arab uprisings of 2011, contrasting the Egyptian experience with that of Saudi Arabia. My argument is conditioned by the fact that I observed the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a city where, throughout the months of revolt that have gripped the Arab world, one could have heard a proverbial pin drop. It is conditioned more explicitly by the fact that Egypt is the largest social media market in the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia the third largest. If social media was the determining element of the Arab uprisings, as the euphoria of the moment seemed to suggest, why were the outcomes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt so vastly different?

In order to ascertain the influence of social media on the Arab uprisings of 2011, it would help first to identify and define the broader context in which social media is operating, namely, the new media context. Over the past several decades, communication technologies like satellite television, cellular phones, and the Internet have dramatically influenced the way in which people absorb and produce information. A number of scholars have examined the role of new media in reshaping Middle Eastern societies.\(^1\) In the view of these scholars, new media is more than anything else a driver of social change. The most common application of this view in the context of the 2011 Arab uprisings is that social media was the *sine qua non* of the revolutionary movements that toppled Middle Eastern autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt. Western cable news stations leapt quickly onto this narrative, while Al-Jazeera played host to a rotating lineup of guest analysts who sang the praises of the youth of the “Facebook Revolution.”\(^2\)

The narrative of social media’s transformative properties is justifiable in some respects. In Egypt, anti-regime Facebook pages like “We Are All Khaled Said” helped foster a solidarity of sentiment and numerical strength that had eluded previous generations of regime opponents. A familiar problem arises, however, when social media becomes an object of discussion set apart from the motive forces – personal and historical – that condition its use in a specific political context. This is the fallacy of technological determinism, which after the toppling of Mubarak and Ben Ali, helped foster a presumption that the proliferation of social media in a given Arab context would necessarily lead to democratic revolution and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes.

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2. When invoked by these middle-aged Arab intellectuals, however, the phrase seemed more like shorthand for the incomprehensible.
As the bloody and complicated conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain are demonstrating, underlying social and political dynamics continue to dictate political outcomes, with technology playing a more complex and less determinant role than is conventionally ascribed to it. This observation suggests a second and no less significant way of understanding the role of the Internet and new media, as a mirror of underlying social dynamics, not transformative so much as reflective, and sometimes even reinforcing of pre-Internet values and hierarchies. My own research on Internet use in Saudi Arabia has identified the ways by which pre-Internet status hierarchies are often reinforced or adapted to the new media environments of Internet discussion forums.3 The power of social media to amplify grassroots social and political conservatism must not be overlooked.

In any given society, the Internet and social media perform both of the above described functions, propelling social change and reflecting social systems. Treating the Middle East as a region, I would argue that it is not the Internet and social media, but rather the underlying dynamics of a given society that determine where opposition movements in the region will emerge and succeed. Social media serves largely as an accelerant of processes already afoot.

If this is the case, then why have we locked onto social media as the main story of the Arab uprisings? This is because of a third, complementary function of the Internet and social media – as a window for Western academics, journalists, activists, and general consumers of news into Middle Eastern societies. Before the new media age, media penetration was a unidirectional phenomenon, flowing from Cold War-era propaganda and commercial centers into the radios and television sets of developing countries. Western attention to social media use by Egyptians is thus an expression of the balancing of information flows. But what sort of view do we get through this window? In what language are the signals through this window appearing? Does the view through this window, from our vantage point in the West, truly reflect the balance of forces in a given society? Does it accurately reflect the extent of mobilization or discontent in a given society?

The question of language is important because it determines in part which social media platforms Arabic speakers will use and when. Twitter, for example, does not yet have an Arabic language interface, a fact that definitely inhibits its user base among Arabic speakers.4 Facebook experienced a massive increase in Arabic-speaking users after introducing its Arabic interface. While it is difficult to casually disaggregate Facebook’s overall growth from its growth in specific language zones, the fact that only a small percentage of Arabic speakers are comfortable using English on the Internet would suggest that language platforms matter. How many Egyptians would

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have heard of Khaled Said, the 28-year-old who was beaten to death for refusing to be searched by state security and emerged posthumously as the symbol of the anti-Mubarak movement, if Facebook had not introduced an Arabic language version of itself in February 2009? The question of language is also important for us in the West because it helps determine where we tune our dials – to which individuals and social media platforms. A person following Western press coverage of Saudi Arabia and the major social media platforms in the kingdom in the lead-up to the proposed March 11 protests there might have gotten the sense that major unrest was brewing. But had he or she tuned into older social media platforms like the Internet discussion forums, particularly some of the prominent tribal forums (al-muntadayat al-qabaliyya), they would have observed widespread sympathy for the king and antipathy toward the demonstrators.

There is no doubt that progressive, networked elements of Egyptian society were at the fulcrum of the recent uprising, and that it would likely not have occurred when it did without their deft outmaneuvering of Egyptian authorities, in part via social media. But subsequent developments in Egypt, including the outcome of the constitutional referendum, suggest that a silent majority comprised of residents of smaller cities and towns across the country has determined itself unwilling to follow the secularizing agenda of the young activists, and will likely adhere to a more conservative, populist, and old media course in their choice of future leaders. Media use by rural Egyptians has received detailed ethnographic treatment in a recent study by Sahar Khamis. Returning after ten years to examine changes in media consumption patterns by women in the Egyptian delta village of Kafr Masoud, Khamis found that while the Internet is becoming increasingly influential, television still dominates media consumption in rural Egypt.

It is perhaps then not inappropriate to conclude that, rather than social media, it was the satellite television station Al-Jazeera that drew the majority of the Egyptian protesters into the streets. Al-Jazeera, that old (state-run) media instrument in a new guise, was incredibly important in mobilizing public opinion in Egypt. While BBC and other stations drifted off periodically to report on their requisite marginalia, the Qatari station’s coverage of the demonstrations continued without interruption for weeks. Al-Jazeera invited scores of opposition figures to speak live on the air every day

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6. Egyptians went to the polls on 19 March 2011 to cast their votes in a referendum on constitutional reforms designed to limit the power of the executive and speed parliamentary elections. While the amendments were approved by three-fourths of voters, many urban voters rejected the electoral provisions for giving an unfair advantage to established political organizations and diminishing the prospects of a progressive, secular politics from taking root.

and night. In the days before Mubarak’s resignation, protesters erected a huge screen to broadcast Al-Jazeera live in Tahrir Square. On the night of Mubarak’s resignation, some celebrants in Tahrir Square raised a massive banner thanking two parties in particular for making the revolution possible – the Egyptian armed forces and Al-Jazeera. To watch oneself making history, to be both object and subject in this process – this is one of the most fascinating aspects of the Egyptian uprising, and one that lay beyond the scope of social media. Besides, as one LISD social media workshop panelist noted with respect to Egyptian Facebook activist Wael Ghonim, the man behind the “We Are All Khalid Said” campaign, Ghonim’s first engagement after being released from prison was with a popular private Egyptian satellite television program, where he sat for a lengthy interview.

In the Saudi case, many of the ingredients for social media-driven revolution were in place during the lead-up to the Arab Spring. A tech-savvy, increasingly Westernized mass of youth was acquiring consciousness in a country with limited opportunities for stimulating employment, and had begun to agitate in fits and starts for greater opportunity, more social mobility, and an end to mediocrity in the notoriously conservative kingdom. Yet outside of the Eastern Province, no serious opposition movement has emerged to challenge the regime’s legitimacy. Inspired by events in Egypt and Tunisia, Saudi intellectuals and prominent figures circulated a number of online petitions demanding political reform according to a fixed timetable. Signatories included prominent religious conservatives like Salman al-Awda and Yussef al-Ahmad, as well as a host of established liberal figures. One young activist set up a website for Saudis to lodge complaints against their government. It is telling that of the thousands of complaints posted on the site, practically none were directed toward the key institutions of regime control (e.g., Ministry of Interior, Saudi Arabian National Guard). The most substantial development in the kingdom during this period was an anonymous Facebook page calling for nationwide protests against the regime on March 11.

March 11 was a strange day in Saudi Arabia. Police cars patrolled the streets constantly and almost all shops were shuttered. Helicopters flew overhead in certain areas and there was a palpable sense of unease. Yet no protests occurred, neither in Riyadh nor in Jedda, the kingdom’s two principal cities. That an anonymous Facebook call could initiate a regime-wide mobilization demonstrates the enormous power of social media and the Internet. But the ghostly quality of Saudi streets on that day speaks to the superior power of the underlying dynamics in that country. Saudi society was neither ready nor willing to demonstrate, a fact confirmed for me both in my observations of daily life and in the scores of interviews I conducted. Young Saudis I spoke with, if not reflexively averse to the idea of protest, were for the most part turned off by the anonymity of the Facebook page and its unfocused message. It is worth pointing out that the Egyptian Facebook campaign that helped topple the Mubarak regime was also anonymous. The discrepancy between Saudi and Egyptian responses to anonymity may reflect the lack of a widespread network of activists coordinating their efforts throughout the Saudi kingdom. The Egyptian Facebook campaign was
the culmination of a decade-long engagement with the tools of new media and non-violent protestation on the part of a broad collective of Egyptian activists, both secular and Islamist. By contrast, Saudi Arabia’s activist community had sat on the sidelines while the regime confronted Al-Qaeda domestically, and was in no position to argue for regime destabilization while over the past decade nominal oil prices were reaching historic highs and the national bounty was overflowing. Lastly, one cannot discount the fact that, on balance, Egypt is poor, while Saudi Arabia is rich, making most Saudi citizens less interested in forcing political change. The Wael Ghonims of Saudi Arabia are more inclined to see their desire for reform realized through entrepreneurship and market mechanisms than radical measures like regime overthrow.

In conclusion, the Internet and social media can help empower democratic movements in the Middle East to resist non-democratic regimes, but it will not produce the same outcome in every Middle Eastern country. The influence of social media should therefore be considered in terms of the underlying social and political dynamics of a given country, and not as an independent driver of change. The old is the new.
The Arab revolutions of 2011 were wonderful to behold. The established order, unresponsive and often cruel, suddenly found its control of public life slipping away. Enabled by unprecedented connectivity to information sources and like-minded fellow citizens, those who had remained silent for so long in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere, found their voices and raised a din that caused the walls of autocracy to crack and then crumble . . . in some places. Elsewhere, the powerful, through force or cunning (or a mixture of the two), retained control, at least for the time being.

Regardless of short-term outcomes, the significance of these revolutions extends far beyond the Arab world. As always, the dynamics of the Middle East affect the rest of the global community, but in this instance we will see lasting change in the ways that international relations are conducted.

Among the lessons deserving attention:

- Democracy remains appealing and people are still willing to put their lives on the line to attain it.

- As the venues of mass communication become more diverse and pervasive, individual citizens become intellectually and politically empowered. They know more about what is going on around them and they use media tools to form communities of interest that enhance political activism.

- Governments must learn to cope with political developments that proceed at an ever-faster pace. Even the “24-hour news cycle” has become archaic because it relied on a finite number of information providers whose content could be monitored by policy makers. Now, the information sources are so dispersed and numerous that governments trying to keep up with events lack systematic ways to digest and judge information, and their policy making becomes hesitant and purely reactive.

The political energy evident in the Arab world in 2011 and its effectiveness in bringing about change might be replicated elsewhere, and policy makers within and outside the states where this takes place must be better prepared to respond.

Policy makers cannot be mere spectators. Stunned surprise is an inadequate response to transformative events, and yet that is what we saw from the United States and other major powers as the Arab revolutions unfolded. President Barack Obama and other world leaders tried to respond as events were occurring, but they always seemed to be behind the curve. Part of the problem was flawed intelligence analysis that overesti-
mated the staying power of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and others, but the main difficulty was the inability of the foreign policy decision-making process to keep pace with developments taking place on Arab streets.

A fundamental incompatibility exists between speed and diplomacy. Effective diplomacy cannot be done on the fly; it requires back-and-forth among parties, an ability to listen and respond carefully. During much of the twentieth century, speed steadily encroached on diplomatic process as the public came to increasingly rely upon radio, and then television, and then the Internet as principal sources of information. The diplomatic pouch became largely obsolete as foreign ministries turned first to open sources such as the BBC, CNN, and, more recently, Twitter, to find out what was going on in distant parts of the world.

But even reports from the most highly-regarded news organizations are not always correct, particularly when journalistic standards are compromised in the pursuit of getting a story first rather than first getting it right. Governments have their own information gathering mechanisms, in the form of diplomats and intelligence agencies, but when much of the world seems to be moving at the breakneck speed of broadcast and online media, waiting to hear from slower – and perhaps better – sources might not be politically feasible.

Furthermore, when it comes to citizens’ political action, the role that media play in international affairs should not be exalted to the point at which the courage of individuals is underrated. Despite the rush in 2011 to define the uprisings in the Middle East as the “Facebook Revolution” or “Twitter Revolution,” these revolutions belonged to people, not media, and to characterize them otherwise is to insult those who took the risk to go into the streets to demand change.

Media are tools – nothing more. Whether the carbon copies of samizdat writings that were circulated surreptitiously in the Soviet Union or the YouTube videos that were produced by young Egyptians, these manifestations of resistance and rebellion can inform and encourage, but the actions that bring about change must be undertaken by individuals, and lasting change requires reform, and sometimes rebirth, of institutions.

The events of 2011 in the Arab world offer an intriguing perspective on twenty-first-century politics. The uprisings that began in Tunisia were not spontaneous in the sense that they arose from nothing. Politics does not work that way. The grievances, frustrations and anger about the economic and social status quo in most Arab states had been building for decades. The trigger for revolt was the suicide by self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. He was a former college student who, like many others, could not find a better job than selling fruit and vegetables on the city streets. In despair about his future and after being harassed by police, he set himself on fire in December 2010 and died the following month.
Bouazizi’s death triggered the revolt in Tunisia, serving as a “last straw” for thousands of Tunisians who saw in his frustration a mirror image of their own lives. Social media was the initial amplifier of this frustration. Facebook became the town square – a relatively protected zone where dissent could be expressed to a largely sympathetic audience without the same level of fear of the state security apparatus that might have muted protests in physical, rather than cyber space.

Given the limited Internet access in Tunisia, the protest movement was provided a huge lift by an older medium: television. Satellite channels, particularly Qatar-based Al-Jazeera, aggregated material from Facebook, YouTube, and other online sources and broadcast it to a vast audience. In Tunisia, broadband penetration is just 24 percent, but television penetration is 93 percent,¹ which underscores the significance of television channels as sometimes the most far-reaching disseminators of social media content.

A word should also be said about even older media – print and radio. In much of the world, these are still the best ways to reach the many people, especially in rural areas, who have little or no access to television or Internet-based media. Radio has special value to those who cannot read or write.

As historian Robert Darnton notes, “The marvels of communication technology in the present have produced a false consciousness about the past – even a sense that communication has no history, or had nothing of importance to consider before the days of television and the Internet.”² Darnton also points out, “Radio did not destroy the newspaper; television did not kill radio; and the Internet did not make TV extinct. In each case the information environment became richer and more complex. That is what we are experiencing in this crucial phase of transition to a dominantly digital ecology.”³

Diplomats who claim to be up-to-date because they have their own Twitter feeds or Facebook pages miss the point. Many of them are enamored of gadgetry without recognizing what media tools can really do on a macro level. The foreign policy establishment in many countries is exceedingly slow to recognize change, in this case the impact of networks that communication-based connectivity enables.

Some of the major powers still seem enamored of strategies that worked well during the Cold War. Perhaps, in retrospect, those appear to have been simpler days, with the principal adversaries clearly identified and the rest of the world’s nations serving as

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supporting players that could be courted or ignored, depending on the superpowers’ whims. The information space could be defined and controlled; propaganda could be delivered to audiences with few alternative sources of news about the world.

Today the Cold War’s trickle of information has become a torrent, and navigating the flow requires a sturdy craft that has been designed to sustain the buffeting that is part of the new strategic information environment. Diplomacy and broader political mechanisms are affected by this.

Part of this revision of practice will require a realistic appraisal of social media’s power. Wael Ghonim, the Google executive who was a major player in the Tahrir Square protests, said that the revolution began “in June 2010 when hundreds of thousands of Egyptians started collaborating content. We would post a video on Facebook that would be shared by 60,000 people on their walls within a few hours. I’ve always said that if you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet.”

That pronouncement, and others like it, was a product of the euphoria surrounding the demise of Hosni Mubarak, and it should be taken as such. Just giving people the Internet does not guarantee a revolution, certainly not a successful one. A different view was expressed by NBC News correspondent Richard Engel, who said of events in Egypt, “This didn’t have anything to do with Twitter and Facebook. This had to do with people’s dignity, people’s pride. People are not able to feed their families.”

A case can also be made that the events of 2011 were not true “revolutions” because a revolution requires substantive institutional restructuring, not just regime change. As David and Marina Ottaway observed, the pro-democracy activists in Tunisia and Egypt “have not brought to the fore a new ruling class, a system of governance, or the profound social and economic changes associated with the classical meaning of revolution. And it remains to be seen whether they will succeed in doing so.”

Nevertheless, whatever term is used to describe events in the Arab world in 2011, it can be said that these were the most important changes in international affairs since the collapse of communism in 1989. Most foreign policy experts, in and out of government, were surprised by the speed and breadth of events, and some soon recognized that diplomacy will require imaginative restructuring if it is to deal effectively with such events in the future.

In diplomacy as in other aspects of public policy, responding quickly and responding

4. Jeffrey Ghannam, “In the Middle East, This Is Not a Facebook Revolution,” Washington Post, 18 February 2011.
wisely might be very different. Traditional diplomats – such as George Kennan and Dean Acheson – would presumably have argued that diplomacy and speed are not only incompatible, but they are fundamentally antithetical. But today’s world requires rapid response; the public expects it and events are fueled by high-speed communication that causes them to zoom past careful diplomats. Good diplomatic practice should not be tossed aside, but it must adapt to the pace of events more comprehensively than it has to date.

One of the factors behind changes in diplomatic practice is the same technology that was so visible during the 2011 revolutions: social media. These participatory media forms include the well-known Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as many variations, with new ones popping up almost every day. Consider the traditional ways to get information – the newspaper that arrives on your doorstep when the newspaper company decides to deliver it; the television newscast that appears on your screen when the broadcast company decides to present it. In these and similar cases, there were providers and consumers of content. The consumers were passive recipients, selecting items from a very limited menu of offerings. They had choices, the numbers of which rose and fell as newspapers (especially those delivered in the evening) closed and television channels grew, but the public had little ability to be providers themselves except in limited ways, such as through writing letters or talking on the telephone.

Within the past few years, all this has changed. Almost anyone can both gather and disseminate information. The most widespread tool for this is the mobile telephone; more than five billion were in use by mid-2010. Record a few minutes of video on your phone, post it on YouTube, and millions can watch whatever you have decided is newsworthy. For many, such “news” consists of the cute antics of a child, but others, such as those who recorded images of upheaval in Sanaa or Damascus, become independent, one-person news suppliers – “journalists” in a broad sense of the word.

Beyond dissemination of information, these social media tools provide infrastructure for networks that in a political context can be the foundation of a revolutionary movement. Or so the argument goes. Critics argue that social media-based networks are flimsy because they are too easy to join, regardless of the joiner’s motivation. Malcolm Gladwell wrote,

> The platforms of social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with. That’s why you can have a thousand ‘friends’ on Facebook, as you never could in real life. … Social networks are effective at increasing participation – by lessening the level

Clay Shirky viewed social media as more significant: “Do social media allow insurgents to adopt new strategies? And have those strategies ever been crucial? Here, the historical record of the last decade is unambiguous: yes and yes. Digital networks have acted as a massive positive supply shock to the cost and spread of information, to the ease and range of public speech by citizens, and to the speed and scale of group coordination.”

This debate shows no signs of abating. Social media have certainly been influential in the shift toward citizen power, but how influential – whether they play a truly determinative role – in events such as the Arab revolutions is worth exploring.

At issue is not just the function of social media in themselves, but also the displacement of traditional hierarchies by networks. This is more than a semantic issue, because diplomacy and other political mechanisms will need to be realigned to deal with the rise of networks. The stratified structures of leadership common in most states will not disappear overnight, but the dispersed elements of networks will become more significant as the newest communication technologies become more widespread, fostering increased connectivity among these elements.

The foremost scholar of networks, Manuel Castells, defines networks as “complex structures of communication constructed around a set of goals that simultaneously ensure unity of purpose and flexibility of execution by their adaptability to the operating environment. … Their structure evolves according to the capacity of the network to self-configure in an endless search for more efficient networking arrangements.”

Castells adds that,

\[\text{networks became the most efficient organizational forms as a result of three major features of networks which benefited from the new technological environment: flexibility, scalability, and survivability. Flexibility is the ability to reconfigure according to changing environments and retain their goals while changing their components, sometimes bypassing blocking points of communication channels to find new connections. Scalability is the ability to expand or shrink with little disruption. Survivability is the ability of networks, because they have no single center and can operate in a wide range of configurations, to withstand attacks.}\]

11. Ibid., 23.
The ability to reconfigure is the key to networks’ effectiveness in contexts such as those of the 2011 Arab uprisings. In many cases, a traditional hierarchic structure lacks the agility to avoid fast and ferocious suppression by established forces of power, and also lacks networks’ communication orientation. This adaptability of networks also adds levels of complexity to diplomacy because networks’ protean nature can disrupt the consistency on which diplomats prefer to rely. In evaluating the importance of social media in a networked society, it is important to avoid absolutist pronouncements about the extent to which these media have transformed the public sphere. They are very important – there is no doubt about that – but are they truly transformative in themselves? A case can be made that they are not, that the transformation of political life as seen during the Arab revolutions arose from more traditional issues related to economic welfare, oppressive government behavior, and the overall miserable nature of life forced upon millions of people by autocratic regimes.

Barack Obama and other world leaders were criticized for their allegedly slow response to the fast-accelerating events in the Arab world during 2011. In evaluating such criticism, a question arises: how can any policy maker keep pace with the vast amount of information coming from a vast number of sources?

The public’s expectations are geared to the speed of the information flow, but that does not necessarily mean that those who govern should try to keep up with this flow, regardless of cost. Fast policy making is often unwise policy making, but that is an inadequate answer to those who are accustomed to getting their news with the click of a mouse and expect to see crises resolved by the next time they click. Trying to match the pace of diplomacy to the speed of social and other media is ill-advised, but policy makers must do a better job of addressing the political realities and technological capabilities of a social media oriented society that relies heavily on networks of various kinds.

Although no precise formula emerges from considering these matters, scholars and practitioners must define the context in which policy makers and the public will be considering and responding to political events for years to come. The Arab revolutions of 2011 are just a starting point, and a long path lies ahead.
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Facebook Pages and Tweeters

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About the Contributors

David Faris is currently teaching and researching at Roosevelt University in downtown Chicago. He earned his PhD in Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia in 2010. His dissertation focused on the use of digital media by Egyptian opposition movements. In his dissertation he argued that the networking capabilities of social media are converging to produce the potential for democratic transition during moments of crisis. Current research projects include contributing to a global digital activism dataset (GDADS) through the Meta-Activism Project, as well as article projects on authoritarian media systems, Islamist digital activism in Egypt, and Muslim experiences in American airspace.

Ahmed Ghanim, born and raised in Egypt, is an Egyptian American writer and poet that immigrated to the US after graduating from medical school in Cairo. Ghanim currently has his first (early) collection of poems under print, Dawi Al Samt (The Echo of Silence). His passion for creative writing and journalism inspired him to promote freedom and civil rights across nations, using his voice to inspire younger generations in hopes of bring change to the Middle East. He does this by writing and offering his works through the most popular online news and media outlets in the Middle East, Masrawy.com and Maktoob.com. His experiences in journalism in English and Arabic include interviews with prominent political leaders and advisors, articles on civil rights, poems, and news reports. In February 2011, he conducted an exclusive interview with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on social media.

Barry Libert is a business executive, author, and speaker based in Boston, Massachusetts. He has more than 25 years of executive leadership and entrepreneurial experience, and has been instrumental in advancing the awareness and use of Web 2.0 and social technologies within the business world. Libert is the Chairman and CEO of Mzinga, the leading provider of social software, services, and analytics that improve business performance. He has published five books on the value of social networks and human interaction. He is a regularly featured keynote speaker and has delivered speeches to audiences of 20,000+ globally. As co-author of the critically acclaimed book, We Are Smarter Than Me, in which Libert and his co-authors highlighted the power of social technologies by using the Wiki-based contributions of more than 4,000 people to illustrate how businesses could profit from the wisdom of crowds. Libert has also co-authored two additional books on the value of business information and relationships. He has been published in Newsweek, Smart Money, Barron’s, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Times, and he has appeared on CNN, CNBC, FNN, and NPR. In addition to forging Mzinga’s vision and strategy, Libert currently serves on the Board of Directors at Innocentive and the SEI Center for Advanced Studies in Management at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. In 2000, Libert founded Shared Insights, one of Mzinga’s predecessor companies. Prior to Shared Insights, he was a senior partner at Arthur Andersen and John Hancock. He
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**Michael Mayer** is a senior at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, specializing in finance, and expects to receive a BS in Economics in May 2012. His interest in the value of social media has led Mayer to research the value of self-determination and self-actualization in business and government. Mayer worked as a marketing representative for Vita Coco, a large sports drink company. He also has worked for Baby Blues BBQ in Philadelphia, helping to enhance the company's use of social media. Mayer worked as an investment-banking analyst for Credit Suisse during summer 2011.

**Caroline McCarthy** is a journalist, columnist, and television commentator for CBS and CNET.com, reporting on digital innovation and new media. She has appeared on CNBC's “Power Lunch,” “On the Money,” and “Street Signs;” MSNBC’s “Countdown with Keith Olbermann” and “MSNBC News Now;” CBS’ “The Early Show;” NBC's “Today;” and NPR’s “Talk of the Nation” (among various other television and radio programs) talking about technology from Facebook to iPads, and about net neutrality. McCarthy is a 2006 graduate of Princeton University with a degree in History of Science and a certificate in Creative Writing.

**Nadav Samin** is a doctoral candidate in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University whose research concerns the cultural politics of modern Saudi Arabia. Samin's publications include an analysis of debates on tribal Internet discussion forums in the kingdom. His articles and reviews have been published in the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication, Arab Studies Journal,* and the *Wall Street Journal,* among others. Previously, Samin was an Arabic translator and a lecturer in Political Science at Hunter College, New York City. Samin recently returned from a three-month research trip to Saudi Arabia, where he conducted interviews with Saudi Internet forum administrators and web entrepreneurs.

**Philip Seib** is Professor of Journalism and Public Diplomacy and Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California, and is director of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy. He is author or editor of numerous books, including *Headline Diplomacy: How News Coverage Affects Foreign Policy,* *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict,* *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War,* *Broadcasts from the Blitz: How Edward R. Murrow Helped Lead America into War,* *New Media and the New Middle East,* *The Al Jazeera Effect,* and *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-Al Qaeda Generation.* He is editor of the Palgrave Macmillan Series in International Political Communication, co-editor of the Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public Diplomacy, and co-editor of the journal *Media, War, and Conflict.*
The Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University (LISD) supports teaching, research, and publication about issues related to and emerging from self-determination, especially pertaining to the state, self-governance, sovereignty, security, and boundaries with particular consideration of socio-cultural, ethnic, and religious issues involving state and non-state actors. The Institute was founded in 2000 through the generosity of H.S.H. Prince Hans-Adam II of Liechtenstein, and is directed by Wolfgang Danspeckgruber.

LISD seeks to enhance global peace and stability by bringing together academic experts, practitioners, representatives of the public and private sectors, and decision makers to explore key events and conflicts from multiple perspectives in order to find new solutions to current and traditional problems. In addition to conferences convened as part of specific LISD projects, the Institute regularly sponsors public lectures and special meetings that bring a diverse group of experts and policy makers from around the world to Princeton University to share their work with students and members of the wider University and local communities.

Since the Institute’s founding, LISD faculty have taught courses that are part of Princeton University’s graduate and undergraduate curricula on topics including international crisis diplomacy, self-determination, Central Asia, and Afghanistan. Princeton University graduate and undergraduate students are also involved with all aspects of LISD projects, from planning meetings and conferences to participating in diplomatic discussions and serving as rapporteurs. Student involvement in Institute projects, as well as courses taught at Princeton University by LISD faculty, are central to the Institute’s commitment to prepare the students of today to be the leaders of tomorrow.