

CHAPTER – VII

CONCLUSION

Revolutions are violent, chaotic events, often accompanied by overhauling of the whole system. Liberal philosopher John Locke proposes that when the government fails to uphold the wishes and aspirations of the people, the people had the right to change it. This can be done by reverting back to civil society, considered as the primary ground upon which the government is set up. The social contract theorists views the civil society stage as the basis for peaceful movements as it is in this stage that man is able to subjugate his selfish interests for the common interest. The foundation of this thought rest upon the belief that man as a rational being realizes that he has the right to demand a political system that is more responsive to his needs and aspirations. Hence, political mobilization being a fundamental feature of this stage, an effective mode of communication is central in order to bring together the different selfish interests under one common interest. And this process has been enabled more easily in recent times owing due to the many developments in communication technology particularly social media with its many to many communication, anonymity factor and its capacity to reach millions within seconds.

The Egyptian Revolution is perhaps the best example of the interaction of these new communication technologies and civil society in the 21st Century. The revolution was characterized by the high usage of social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and accompanied by the emergence of new terms such as the network society,

citizen journalism and virtual civil society. The revolution had shown to the world that even a vibrant civil society can emerge under an authoritarian regime, made possible more so by the development of the new ICTs. Egypt witnessed the growth of a vibrant civil society which was firstly triggered by a host of online communities and groups such as We are All Khaled Said, the ElBaradei Facebook groups as well as the new civil society movements operating online like the April 6 Movement and the Kefaya Movement. These virtual communities, groups and movements ultimately opened up the pathway for the growth of a vibrant civil society in Egypt by politically mobilizing the masses and by preparing them for the 25th January revolution by staging a series of small offline protests prior the actual revolution. These protests further helped in staging the 25th January protest by laying down the foundation upon which all civil society movements are based on by stressing on a non violent movement. The movement was truly a people's movement or a civil society movement as is shown by the active citizen participation both online and offline. But some critics have doubted the role of social media in having any form of concrete impact particularly on encouraging citizen participation but this has been countered more or less by the numerous online videos, posts and tweets that were shared and circulated prior and during the revolution. While it was apparent that discontentment's and tensions were running high against President Mubarak's regime based on the numerous instances of human rights violations, high unemployment rate amongst the educated youth accompanied by high suicide rates; it was social media that triggered the 25 January protest as the call for the protest was first made online on Facebook. The importance of social media is made more apparent by the success of the revolution which many scholars attribute to the regimes under estimation

of the power of social media. The regime turned a blind eye to the online associations which were growing in numbers and which were quickly becoming a source of outlet for the common frustrations and discontentments directed at the regime. This in turn helped in forging a common platform through which the citizens could come together and set down certain common goals one of which was to overthrow President Mubarak.

Possibly the most interesting outcome of the interaction between the new ICTs and civil society is the emergence of a networked society. Social media with its capacity to reach millions within seconds has shrunk the world by connecting citizens from all parts of the world. This inherent power of communication technology has proved to be highly beneficial for civil society by creating a common platform through which social solidarity and common goals can be developed and achieved. The activists can now transmit information at a much faster and more cheaper rate thereby enabling greater chances of political mobilization. The social media platform becomes all the more important for a country like Egypt where freedom of assembly, speech and expression are highly restricted on account of the Emergency Law along with a series of laws and regulations. The absence of censorship and anonymity in the virtual world allowed an open communication that encouraged the Egyptian activists and citizens to interact freely which in the process helped in strengthening social solidarity and finally culminating in the demand for certain common goals and objectives one of which was to remove President Hosni Mubarak from power. This new networked society encouraged participation on two levels, firstly, it encouraged cyber activism by enabling the activists to politically educate and mobilize the masses through the different Facebook pages and groups like the Khaled Sa'id page, ElBaradei groups. Secondly, it also allowed what is

known as self- directed mass communication leading to a rise in citizen journalism. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were the three main social media platforms utilized by the Egyptians.

Some of the main findings concerning social media use by the activists and the protesters are as firstly, Facebook was utilized primarily as a tool to politically educate and mobilize the masses. Facebook pages like the Khaled Said page were brave enough to speak out against the regime's brutality in the process encouraging the Egyptian masses to politically participate in the online debates and discussions. Aside from political education the Khaled Said page along with a small host of other *Facebook* groups like the April 6 Movement and the ElBaradei groups also helped in preparing the Egyptians for a non violent movement by staging a series of small protests, the guidelines of which posted online. Facebook was also utilized by the protesters as an efficient medium for presenting their version of events through varied posts/updates, pictures, videos, links etc.

Secondly, Twitter was particularly helpful in posting short updates during the revolution. It helped the activist to spread quick short messages to the protesters for instance, like dealing with emergency situations, time and venue for the protests while the protestors were also able to reach out to each other in times of distress by sending out sos messages. Twitter also served an efficient and quick means for sending out important updates to the world.

Thirdly, since the state media was monitored strictly by the government YouTube served as an important medium by allowing the protesters to broadcast videos of the revolution to the Egyptians and to the world. It helped in presenting to the world the true

state of violence that the government was inflicting upon the protesters. Through YouTube the protesters were able to send out unedited and true versions of the events that unfolded in the revolution.

This increased online participation enabled through social media brought about a thriving virtual civil society in Egypt. The absence of censorship and anonymity coupled with the freedom of assembly prevalent in the virtual world allowed the Egyptians a platform through which they could come together and voice their common grievances against the regime. In spite of the criticisms a virtual civil society did emerge in Egypt as the characteristics of conventional civil society which is marked by the presence of an active citizen participation and a vibrant associational life were found to be prevalent in the virtual world. The virtual associations and communities helped in triggering a vibrant civil society by encouraging civic engagement through a common platform by promoting social solidarity and formation of common goals. These virtual associations and communities in turn triggered the emergence of a vibrant conventional civil society by transferring the online social solidarity onto the real world. Social media and its mass mobilization tools helped in ushering a rather radical model of civil society in Egypt reminiscent of the radical models that emerged in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1980s. Concepts like ‘self management,’ ‘action civil society’ and ‘civil society first’ the defining characteristic of the radical models helped in moulding the already stagnating conventional civil society in Egypt with the aid of social media. Social media created not only new opportunities for cyber activism but also changed the landscape of collective action by providing a platform for political expression and sharing of information. A highly restrictive political environment along with a civil society that simply existed as a

tool of the regime; the virtual world created a gateway through which the Egyptians could come together and frame certain common goals. This helped in creating a vibrant virtual civil society which in turn facilitated the emergence of a vibrant conventional civil society in Egypt.

Based on the above analysis some important factors come to play environment, technology and the aspirations/ goals of the people. In order to fully examine the impact of social media on civil society as well as the reason why Egypt could not retain its vibrant civil society, it is pertinent to analyze the above factors based on situations which existed prior and in the aftermath of the revolution.

Prior the revolution

► Political environment: The prevalence of the Emergency Laws, an economy that only favored the rich, lack of political freedom, poverty, high rate of unemployment and suicides, strict monitoring of state media.

► Technology: Under President Mubarak ICTs were encouraged in the hope that it will usher in development. Egypt witnessed a thriving online community, some examples of which were We Are All Khaled All Sa'id, the ElBaradei Facebook groups and the April 6 Movement.

► Hopes/aspirations of the people: There were widespread discontentment and hatred against the regime; a fact that was made apparent from the increase in online communities which finally triggered the revolution.

Aftermath of the revolution

- ▶ Political environment: The military assumed power and retained the same laws and regulations which existed during President Mubarak's regime; more or less Egypt continued to have the same political setting that existed prior the revolution.
- ▶ Technology: Many of the cyber activists were arrested after the revolution and the military unlike the previous regime began to strictly monitor social media.
- ▶ Hopes/aspirations of the people: In the aftermath of the revolution Egypt's economy was in chaos coupled with the fear that an Islamic regime might come into power.

Based on the above factors some important analysis can be made, firstly, the political environment or the political setting constitutes an important factor in acting as an indication of the utilization of social media which in turn is dependent upon the goals and aspirations of the people. Secondly, technology by itself is a most powerful tool which can be utilized to a great extent particularly in a country like Egypt which is governed by highly restrictive laws and regulations acting as great limitations on freedom of speech and expression and freedom of assembly. Thirdly, the hopes and aspirations of the people are dependent up to a high degree on the political environment.

Based on the above findings, the impact of social media on the Egyptian revolution can be analyzed as firstly, the highly restrictive political environment led the Egyptians to seek out an alternative platform through which they could come together and mold certain common goals and objectives. Secondly, this process in turn gave an impetus to the high usage of social media in Egypt. Thirdly, the high social media usage helped in transferring the already established online social solidarity onto the real world.

While on the other hand, the reasons why Egypt could not maintain a vibrant civil society in the aftermath of the revolution are: The revolutionaries had a series of demands to put an end to the Emergency Law, poverty and unemployment, hereditary succession and most of all to remove President Hosni Mubarak. Like the aftermath of most revolutions the achievement of the long term goals like poverty and unemployment cannot take place overnight but it did succeed in putting an end to hereditary succession by overthrowing President Mubarak. Post the revolution, however, in the aftermath of the revolution Egypt could not maintain its vibrant civil society. Some of the main factors responsible for it are firstly, post the revolution the Egyptian society reverted back to more or less the same political settings. With Mubarak gone the military took over the government and a little grouping of senior generals the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF) led by the long term Defense Minister Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi took over. Post the revolution, with the downfall of President Mubarak most Egyptians felt that the main goal of the revolution was more or less achieved, this coupled with the fear of an Islamic rule led the Egyptians to accept the political situations as it was. Secondly, the military came down heavily on the activists and harshly suppressed the protests which emerged post the revolution. Thirdly, the state media continued to be moderately monitored by SCAF in order to ensure security and stability.

Social media itself is a most powerful tool, with its inherent features like anonymity, cheap means of communication, capacity to reach millions within seconds, all these factors combined has changed the landscape of collective action. The example of which is shown by the Egyptian Revolution where social media empowered a generation to change its history. No doubt that the revolution did not begin simply because of social

media there are many socio economic and political factors that united a nation to fight against a tyrant; however, social media did help in accelerating the revolution by providing effective means of communication that helped in building social solidarity and in due course uniting one nation under certain common goals and objectives. A more in depth analysis shows that the hopes and aspirations of the people play the utmost role in utilizing social media as a tool for change. As under similar political settings, the hopes and aspirations of the Egyptians prior and in the aftermath of the revolution changed immensely and this can be taken as a determinant factor to the utilization of social media. This can also be to a certain degree verifiable by the democratic systems where there is usually a high usage of the social media networks yet it has only been moderately applied as a tool for ushering change.

The technological age has empowered men with a tool that is so powerful that it can connect individuals from across the world within seconds. Additionally, it has also enabled sharing of information in a faster and cheaper way. And for an authoritarian regime like Egypt this is a boon to its people who had been isolated from the public sphere. The social media networks helped build virtual social networks free from the prying eyes of the regime and in the process creating a whole new space for interaction and collective action. In all, the 21st Century has truly shifted the power to the people by placing before men the most effective means of mass communication social media. Its usage or utilization however rests solely with the people, the users of technology, and how much they desire to usher in change into their surroundings.